Pétrus Borel: Background Reception and Interpretation

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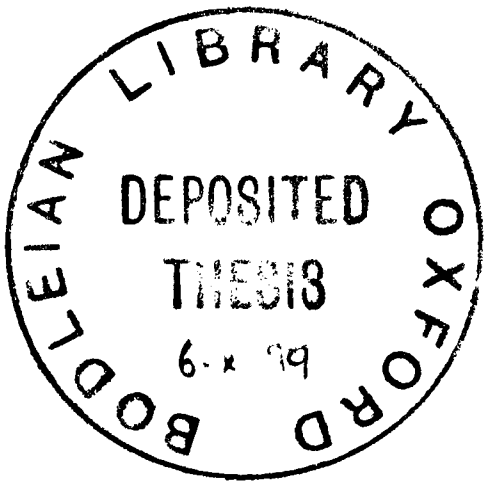

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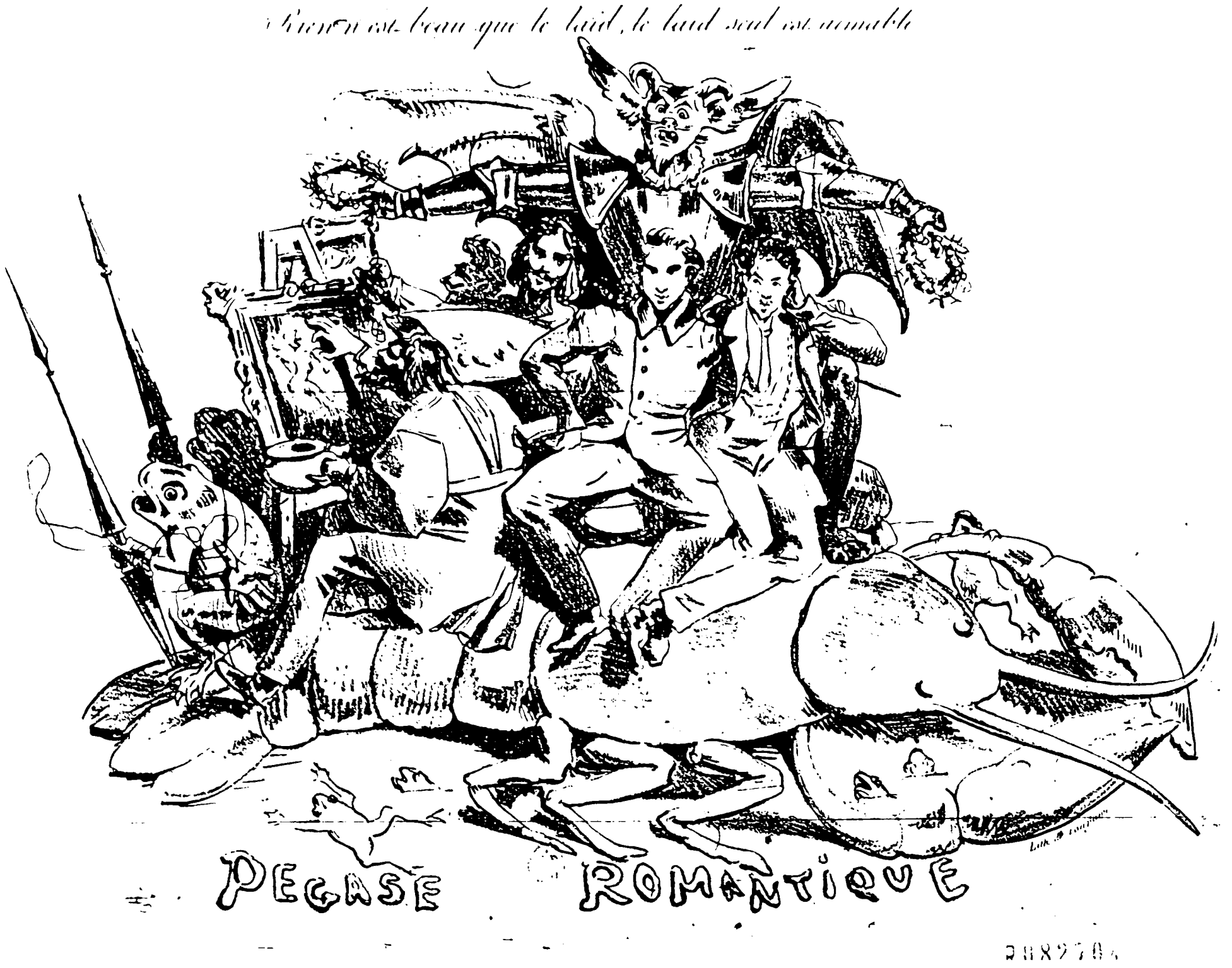

'Rien n'est beau que le laid, le laid seul est aimable.'

The illustration by J. G. Scheffer depicts the Romantic pantheon of the early 1830s. The seated figures, facing forward, are, from left to right, Pétrus Borel, Victor Hugo, and Alexandre Dumas. (Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Estampes et Gravures, Tf 40 Fol. 'Caricatures intellectuelles (littérature, théâtre)').

Table of Contents

Introduction	**iii**
Chapter 1 - *Bousingos* and *Jeunes-France*: The development of a Political and Literary Myth in Early 1830s France	**1**
Chapter 2 - Literary Ethics, Irony and Pétrus Borel's *Rhapsodies*	**48**
Chapter 3 - Pétrus Borel's *Champavert*	**87**
Chapter 4 - Pétrus Borel's *Madame Putiphar*	**155**
Chapter 5 - The Legacy of Pétrus Borel	**222**
Conclusion	**279**
Appendix I - The Concept of Romantic Irony	**282**
Appendix II - Irony and the Ethics of Fiction in 1830s France	**288**
Appendix III - Pixerécourt's *Latude*	**294**
Bibliography	**300**

Introduction

Pétrus Borel was a minor, French Romantic author who was involved with a small group of artists, the 'Petit cénacle', writing and working in early 1830s Paris. They styled themselves on the more famous 'Cénacle', but were more than imitators of the great names of the Romantic movemement. Members of the 'Petit cénacle', which included the young Gautier and Nerval, took their cues from the major figures of the movement, but often pushed the enthusiasm for aesthetic reform, the colorful exoticism and the rebelliousness of Romanticism far beyond what the major figures were willing to attempt. The 'Petit cénacle' became associated in the mind of the public with a small number of groups of political and artistic militants, whose period of greatest activity coincided with the upheaval in the few years following the July Revolution, and with the Romantic battles in the theatre. Borel's group was often confused with the *bousingos,*[1] a species of young political conspirator, and was at times synonymous with the *jeunes-France*, young men whose Romantic and medievalist literary pretensions were often nuanced with utopian socialism or republicanism. The 'Petit cénacle' was well known and documented for its use of provocative political rhetoric, in addition to the group's tendency to express its ideals through raucous behaviour and outlandish costumes. In recent years, these minor Romantics have been considered important for having brought the aesthetic principles of Romanticism into play in everyday life. They were at turns idealistic, violently polemical and republican, or aggressively

[1] There are a number of spellings of the word *bousingo*: *bousingot,* and *bouzingot* are both common variations. I shall discuss the etymology later in the first chapter. Throughout the thesis, I will employ the form that was agreed upon by the members of Borel's literary group, *bousingo*.

fatalistic as suited their ever-changing desire to shock the middle-class and the reading public.

Pétrus Borel was popularly recognised as the leader of this short-lived but lively artistic fraternity. He was briefly seen as destined to follow in the footsteps of Hugo as one of the major figures of French Romanticism: 'Nous le trouvions *très fort* [...] et nous pensions qu'il serait le grand homme spécial de la bande'.[2] In a conversation with Gautier, Maxime Du Camp recalls the expectations of greatness for Borel among the 'Petit cénacle': 'Hugo n'a qu'à bien se tenir; dès que Pétrus publiera, il disparaîtra.'[3] Though this view was later contested by Philothée O'Neddy, there can be no doubt that Borel exercised a substantial influence upon his contemporaries.[4] But because of the marked discrepancy between his perceived potential and his swift eclipse, he is also often seen as an anomalous figure in the literary world of nineteenth-century France. Known popularly as 'the lycanthrope' (i.e., wolf-man), he appeared suddenly and noisily on the literary scene in the early 1830s, and was appreciated as much as a social provocateur and enthusiastic proponent of the stylistic reforms of Romanticism as he was for his written work. For a few brief years, his star shone brightly in the world of letters. Though he published little literature, he led the *jeunes-France*, whom Gautier later parodied in the work of the same name, he contributed numerous articles to the literary press, and he co-founded the artistic review, *La Liberté* in 1832.[5] At the time, political turmoil and literary rebellion were inextricable. Borel characterised their most disharmonious, but perhaps most fruitful combination. Yet Borel's

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[2]Marie, Aristide, *Pétrus Borel, sa vie et son œuvre* (Paris: Editions 'La Force Française', 1922), p. 34. The quotation is from Gautier. The full reference to each work will be given with the first citation. Further citations will be given in abbreviated form. Common abbreviations will be used regarding references or other frequently cited works (e.g.., *Œuvres complètes* becomes *OC*).

[3] Du Camp, Maxime, *Souvenirs littéraires*, 2 vols. (Paris: Hachette, 1883), vol. II, p. 83.

[4]O'Neddy was the pen-name of Théophile Dondey, member of the *Petit cénacle*, best known for his collection of verse, *Feu et flamme* (Paris: Dondey-Dupré et fils, 1832). One expression of the *bousingo* penchant for the provocative and bizarre was their adoption of unusual names, often of Classical or Celtic origin; Théophile Dondey anagramatically became Philothée O'Neddy, and Auguste Maquet became Augustus MacKeat.

[5] Gautier, Théophile, *Les Jeunes France, romans goguenards* (Paris: Renduel, 1833)

contribution to debate on art and politics did not entail a straightforward prescription for political 'engagement' as it would be defined in this century. His address of the pressures that politics and journalism exercised on art is more subtle than most critics have recognised.

Pierre Borel, later to adopt the literary name 'Pétrus', was born in 1809, and spent his childhood in Lyon, where he was brought up on hair-raising stories of the counter-revolutionary movement in Lyon and its brutal repression.[6] In the rather exaggerated account of his family history in Jules Clarétie's 1865 biography, *Pétrus Borel, le lycanthrope*, Borel's father was said to be a nobleman who fought alongside de Précy against the republicans. The truth is more prosaic: it appears that his father was an ironmonger who was fined for counter-revolutionary acts. Throughout his life, Borel maintained a fierce loyalty to his Lyonnais origins, and was influenced by the Lyonnais reaction to 1789 and to the Terror. Additionally, he developed many ideas that found a source in the mysticism of Lyonnais philosophers and theologians such as Ballanche.

He arrived in Paris in his early teens, where he was apprenticed to an architect, Antoine Garnaud, and later to Boulard. Borel worked as an architect into his early twenties, setting up his own office in 1829. According to Clarétie, his earliest biographer, his practice was desperately unsuccessful, and his work was suspected of being structurally unsound by the building authorities. In 1829, he became involved in the Romantic movement, and his life changed forever. He quickly abandoned dreams of architecture for the literary life. He was well acquainted with a number of the rising stars of the literary world. Gautier documents Borel's contacts with Hugo and others, and his role as a leader of the militant wing of Romanticism in *Histoire du romantisme.*[7] He thrived in the climate of insurrection and scandal.

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[6] See Claretie, Jules, *Pétrus Borel, le lycanthrope. Sa vie, ses écrits, sa correspondance. Poésies et documents inédits* (Paris: Pincebourde, 1865).

[7] Gautier, Théophile, *Histoire du romantisme* (Genève: Slatkine Reprints, 1978), chs. 3, 4.

His main body of work includes a volume of poetry, *Rhapsodies*, published in early 1832. The work addresses the artist's preoccupation with political questions, and also with the politics unique to the art world. *Rhapsodies* gives a partial view of Borel's eccentric world-scheme, although much of the poetry is typical for the period and shows little innovation. Many of the poems are Romantic 'Keepsakes', love poetry or poetry on sentimental and picturesque themes, and even his political poetry draws upon a library of images that were, by then, clichéd. This first effort was soon followed by Borel's most successful work, the collection of short stories *Champavert*, published in 1834. The book captures perfectly the morbidity and rebellion that preoccupied the artists of Borel's circle. In addition, the book continues the exploration of questions concerning Borel's perceived relationship with his reading public that had begun in his articles and in his poetry. He employs a number of innovative narrative techniques that were developed in direct response to the debates concerning an artist's responsibility to his public, and the artist's duty to address political questions. His final, major work, *Madame Putiphar*, published in 1839 after a laborious effort, is an awkward novel, attempting to be an epic, that spans the years surrounding the Revolution of 1789. It is a work of at times hallucinatory sadism, long-winded erudition, and predictable melodrama. Many of the themes and moral questions that had preoccupied Borel in his early years form the basis of this, his only novel. Finally, Borel produced sparse, short works of theatrical criticism, character sketches, and a small number of short stories, but none of his later work matched the verve and intensity of the earlier, nor did it continue to explore energetically the questions that this early literature posed.

During the period of upheaval from 1829 to 1833, discussion among artists naturally turned to their ability to address political questions, and to profit from or be harmed by the rapid development of journalism. Pétrus Borel had a substantial voice in these early debates. Later authors recognise a debt to him, but discerning the nature of this debt is difficult, given his sparse and uneven body of work; additionally, he was linked with certain historical and

cultural currents that, when they died, marked the end of his celebrity. A number of questions naturally arise. How is one to situate an author like Borel? To what extent was he an acute symptom of literary and political fashion, and to what extent did he work to define the conditions of literary and political debate? Borel participated in a number of the important fashions of his day. Many authors besides him, including the young Jules Janin and even the young Balzac, were influenced by books such as Hugo's *Han d'Islande* of 1823 and the recent translation of English and German fantastic and Gothic works. In addition, as a minor Romantic, much of Borel's talent was channelled into the creation of his particular literary persona, and into his functions as a catalyst in the world of letters. Thus, it will be necessary to re-create, in a sense, some of the cultural climate of Borel's epoch in order to address both the extent to which he is a 'specimen', and, on the other hand, the uniqueness of his contributions.

Despite his energy and celebrity, the reputation of Borel's work did not survive long after the initial scandal following its publication. He fell quickly out of fashion, and was associated, in the 1850s and later, with the extravagant style and exaggerated rhetoric of the 'Charnel house' school of Romanticism. As Baudelaire stated:

> Il y a des noms qui deviennent proverbes et adjectifs. Quand un petit journal veut, en 1859, exprimer tout le dégoût et le mépris que lui inspire une poésie ou un roman [...] il lance le mot: *Pétrus Borel*! et tout est dit.[8]

Nevertheless, it is acknowledged by many major authors of the nineteenth century that Borel was influential; unfortunately, exactly what subsequent authors owe to him is difficult to trace. There is no evidence of direct collaboration, and the nature of his influence is apparently highly variable, depending on the author cited. Flaubert, who in his correspondence admits an important debt to Borel, adopts very different Borelian traits from

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[8] Baudelaire, Charles, *OC*, 2 vols. (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1975-6), vol. II, p. 153. *Les Fleurs du Mal* were recognised by the *Revue Anecdotique* as 'ragoûts romantiques à la Pétrus Borel'. (*Revue Anecdotique*, IV, 8, April 1857, pp. 16-30).

those that a number of critics perceive in Baudelaire, but for both of these authors, a familiarity with Borel at an early point in their literary careers played a role that they themselves admitted in their later development.[9] Nevertheless, despite evidence of literary borrowing, it remains to develop a context and a method appropriate to the study of an author whose literary reputation has hitherto depended largely on the testimony of other artists and on legend.

Furthermore, Borel raises interesting questions about the reception of literary works. He was preoccupied with the reception of his work in the critical press and by the reading public. His literary persona, the lycanthrope, was not the straightforward expression of his political attitudes, but was instead a provocative response to critical misapprehension and distortion of his ideas and aims. His literature was only briefly popular, and his impact is in fact most easily discerned in the admiration that other, more appreciative, critics and creative artists expressed for his provocative strategies.

There is an oft-cited remark by Baudelaire that many critics of Pétrus Borel have employed to support the examination of an author who has attracted at least as much scorn as praise. Baudelaire, after recognising the contradictory and uneven nature of Borel's work, nevertheless affirms the necessary place that he occupies in the history of French Romanticism. Baudelaire suggests why a recognition of Borel is necessary to the study of the Romantic period:

> C'est non seulement parce que cet esprit si lourd, si criard, si incomplet qu'il soit, a parfois envoyé vers le ciel une note éclatante et juste, mais aussi parce que dans l'histoire de notre siècle il a joué un rôle non sans importance. Sa spécialité fut la *Lycanthropie*. Sans Pétrus Borel, il y aurait une lacune dans le romantisme.[10]

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[9] Flaubert refers, in numerous letters, to the inspiration he gained from Borel. See chapter 5 of this thesis. In Flaubert one sees the fascination with morbid detail apparent in Borel's short stories; both Flaubert and Borel find cruel joy in the revelation and detailed depiction of society's more sordid aspects: 'Disséquer est une vengeance!' (Flaubert, Gustave, *Œuvres complètes* (Paris: Conard, 1926), vol. XV , p. 347). Baudelaire instead focuses on the aesthetic pose: the fierce misanthropy, the duplicitous and ironic self-disclosure, and the tragedy or *guignon* of a life that left so many promises unfulfilled. See below, note 10.

[10]Baudelaire, Charles, *Œuvres complètes*, 2 vols., vol. II, p. 153.

Baudelaire appreciated his talents despite the ridicule to which Borel was then subject. Nevertheless, he saw Borel as an enigmatic and incomplete figure, and this judgement has been adopted by many later critics. Baudelaire's description of the lacuna that Borel's absence would have left has been the invitation for others to draw the outlines of this hypothetical gap. Unfortunately, this method as adopted by early critics of Borel, such as Jules Clarétie and Aristide Marie, relies too heavily on a direct link concerning the legend that grew up around the man himself. In attempting to outline the potential gap first mentioned by Baudelaire, some critics focus on the enigmatic figure of the lycanthrope at its centre. This appproach presupposes a clear link between authorial intention and text, or between Borel's intention to create a scandalous and legendary persona attached to himself, and the actual myth that developed around him. This approach ignores the dynamism of Borel's dialogue with literary critics and with his reading public, as well as lending itself too easily to interpretation supported by a confusing and eclectic mixture of legend, anecdote and literary history.

In a different fashion, methods of close reading based primarily on semiotics or linguistics also do not always come to grips with the dynamism of Borel's literary project. The prospective reader plays a crucial role in much of Borel's work, and the essence of his dialogue with critics and with the middle-class public, if not easily captured, needs to be discussed. Additionally, the tremendous variation of quality within the body of his work does not often lend itself easily to a consistently structuralist or deconstructivist reading; while such readings may draw out certain subtleties from some of the best short stories in Borel's collection *Champavert*, they may reveal little that helps to characterise the nature of his project when applied to some of the more tiresome and repetitive sections of his novel *Madame Putiphar*. The ambiguity and depth of certain great works that make of them rich critical subjects are not qualities to be found consistently in Borel. Because Borel suffered a contentious relationship as much with his own fitful source of artistic inspiration as with his

public I have adopted a methodology that tries to consider the rhetorical and ethical aspects of an artist's relationship first with his reader, and second with society, both of which form the core of Borel's project.

One further difficulty that arises in many previous critical accounts of Borel is the disparity that becomes evident upon comparing opinions on his persona and potential with modern judgements upon the value of his work. Borel's physical presence within the literary world of his time, the outrageousness of his costume and the brilliance of his conversation, seem to have had as much if not more impact upon his literary reputation among his contemporaries than did his actual printed work. Though this material has its place in the development of Borel's literary identity, it must be rigorously qualified. Early critics, while attempting to paint a complete picture of Borel, have relied on biographical anecdotes to help them paint a picture of 'l'homme et l'œuvre', and all critics tend to rely upon the anecdotes to define directly their expectations of his work. The question arises: 'If Borel was considered so brilliant by his contemporaries, then why did he fail to achieve the greatness predicted?' Jean-Luc Steinmetz, the Surrealists and Bruno Pompili at times see Borel as an uncompleted political project, 'un auteur provisoire', to borrow a term from Steinmetz.[11] Borel is then viewed as a lack, as an unfulfilled possiblity to be understood and completed through the textual and anecdotal keys that serve to recreate an intellectual biography, and by implication, a political agenda, rather than as an author whose inconsistency demands a methodology that is more sensitive to his cultural climate, and to its effect upon the nature of his polemical and literary project.

A number of minor authors of the 1830s have been adopted by recent critics, such as those mentioned above, as an amorphous, rebellious and ambiguous group, fertile ground for

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[11] Steinmetz, Jean-Luc, *Pétrus Borel, un auteur provisoire* (Lille: Presses Universitaires de Lille, 1986); Pompili, Bruno, *Licantropi e meteore* (Bari: Edizioni Dedalo, 1984). For the Surrealists, see notes 11-13.

the application of contemporary literary and political theory. Steinmetz describes them as an unending critical project:

> Les 'petits romantiques' ne formèrent jamais un groupe reconnaissable. Le vocable réunit fictivement, verbalement, des personnalités isolées et des œuvres composites; il réclamerait des guillemets permanents.[12]

The 'incompleteness' of the minor Romantic has led to their appropriation by twentieth-century literary or theoretical groups, and their incorporation into the ideologies of these groups, at once corroborating the group project, lending validity to the study of the minor Romantics themselves, and in a sense, giving them an element of completion by tying their unfinished project to a current and ongoing effort.[13]

The problem with this critical approach lies in the fact that the final analysis often says more about the ideological basis of the critical enterprise than it does about the actual work in question. Though clever and often useful readings result from such analyses, the works of Borel and other minor Romantics are not always of such literary merit, in themselves, as to support the theories that use them as corroboration. Much is left to be said.

Thus, one of the goals of this thesis is to develop the importance of Pétrus Borel based on a different premise: that we should not try to appropriate Borel. The 'romantisme existentiel' of the minor Romantic of the 1830s, and of Borel in particular, had a much greater impact upon the political and literary climate of his own period than it has done in an indirect way on ours, through corroboration of revolutionary ideals or foreshadowing of literary questions.[14] One side effect of this endeavour will be to show that some of the widely accepted premises of the study of the minor Romantic, particularly the continued and,

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[12]Steinmetz, Jean-Luc, 'Jeune-France, bousingos, marginaux' in *Histoire littéraire de la France*, t. VIII (Paris: Editions Sociales, 1977), p. 103.

[13] See below, chapter 5, 'Pétrus Borel au service de la révolution'.

[14] Hoog, Armand, *Les Petits Romantiques Français* (Marseille: Cahiers du Sud, 1949). Hoog sees the minor Romantics as important because they expressed the principles of Romanticism in everyday life, through dress, habits, even cuisine. The significance of his idea of 'romantisme existentiel' will be further discussed in Ch. 1.

for certain critical projects, convenient ambiguity surrounding the appellation, are false. Many minor Romantics were widely recognised and celebrated figures in their own time, exercising a considerable influence upon literary tastes despite their subsequent eclipse. Historical documents, literary and political journals show that the minor Romantics, and even figures associated today with later movements, were divided into specific literary and political 'tribes' or factions, and did in fact play a cooperative and concerted role in the contemporary debates surrounding literature and art under the influence of a particularly dynamic period in French literary and political history. At their forefront was Pétrus Borel.

Chapter 1

Bousingos and *Jeunes-France*: the Development of a Literary and Political Myth in Early 1830s France

Those participating in the literary and political discussions of the early 1830s recognised that journalism, politics and literature became more closely intertwined in these years than they had previously been. An artist's literary identity was indeed often measured by the extent of involvement in politics and in the Romantic movement. Lines of demarcation were drawn quite distinctly in any number of aesthetic and political battles. While today we often focus upon the *bataille d'Hernani* as a turning point, those authors who participated in the debates of the period paint a more chaotic and dynamic picture than the clearly marked fighting between 'Classics' and 'Romantics'. The most polemical among the young Romantics were known, from 1829, as the *jeunes-France*: a tribe of morbid and medievalist authors who were easily recognised by their outrageous dress sense and love of provocation. Other types of literary provocateur followed; a few years later, the *bousingos* brought the outrageousness of the *jeunes-France* into the political arena. These Romantic 'types' were widely caricatured in the artistic and political press. Their popularity underscored the importance of identity in the political and artistic battles of the time. Young artists were quick to distance themselves from elements of artistic or political conservatism through as many forms of expression as they

were able to appropriate. Costume, comportment, cuisine, smoking habits, literary expression, all formed an intricate code that expressed literary and political sensibility.

Simultaneously, the public was equally quick to define and categorise any group that presented a possible threat to the established order. Political revolution was fresh in the collective memory. The *bousingos*, at least, were implicated in a number of political riots and aborted rebellions. Caricature of the *bousingos* and *jeunes-France* helped the public to understand and to render harmless groups that appeared to present a palpable threat to morality and political order. Insurrection carried over into the artistic world just as easily. The raucous premier of *Hernani* was by no means unique. Spontaneous demonstrations and even riots were frequent. Alexandre Dumas remembered the period for its frequent social demonstrations, both political and literary:

> Tous les soirs, sans que l'on pût lui assigner de motif quelconque, un rassemblement se formait sur le boulevard. Le lieu de rassemblement variait du théâtre du Gymnase au théâtre de l'Ambigu [...][1]

As quickly as the public tried to capture the character of the *bousingo* or *jeune-France* in caricature, those groups worked to aggravate public misconceptions. Concurrently, young artists were urgently drawn to address political questions. Borel and his followers were paradigmatic of the ideas that were discussed and the attitudes that were adopted in the face of such speculation; and additionally, in Borel's group can be seen the seeds of later, divergent, literary movements.

What is often overlooked by twentieth-century literary historians is the fact that the most influential debates concerning the *jeunes-France*, the *bousingos*, and by association the role of the artist in society, did not entirely concern authors that are today recognised as of great literary merit. The authors of the period who caused the greatest scandals, whose opinions in matters of literature and politics carried considerable weight

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[1]Dumas, Alexandre, *Mes mémoires*, 25 vols (Paris: Alexandre Cadot, 1852), vol. XX, p. 295.

and who dictated the behaviour and tastes of a generation of young people are not necessarily those who are remembered today. Nevertheless, the evolution of French literary history bears their imprint. During their creative period, artists such as Pétrus Borel, Joseph Bouchardy, and Jehan Duseigneur exercised at least as great or greater an influence on debate concerning the role of the artist in society as their now more famous contemporaries, Gérard de Nerval, Théophile Gautier and even Balzac.[2] Charles Asselineau, in a reminiscence of the first years of the July Monarchy, recalls the artistic spirit of the epoch as embodied in the work and actions of a small group of artists, described in the first poem of Philothée O'Neddy's collection *Feu et flamme*[3]:

> A quiconque voudrait aujourd'hui se renseigner sur l'idéal de la jeunesse francaise en l'an de grâce de 1833, savoir ce qu'on prétendait être en ce temps-là, au prix de quels excès sans limite on était résolu à fuir la platitude et le commun, il suffirait de lire la première pièce 'Pandæmonium' (première Nuit), et de prendre là, sur le fait, les aspirations des jeunes hommes au front capace, au teint mat, au sang léonin, qui festoient dans le sombre atelier de Jehan le statuaire.[4]

Authors now more commonly associated with later periods of production and innovation were actively engaged among the *bousingo* or were recognised by the general public as sharing in their tendencies; falling under the same label in the eye of the public, they thus responded, wilfully or not, to the debate surrounding art and society. In the first

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[2] Bouchardy was best known as the 'Shakespeare du boulevard', for his popular and intricate melodramas. Though his work has not merited the respect of his more famous contemporary dramatists, his celebrity nearly matched that of Dumas during his lifetime. Jehan Duseigneur was a celebrated Romantic sculptor, whose 'Roland furieux' was the sensation of the Salon of 1829, and can be viewed today in the recently opened Richelieu wing of the Louvre. For a short time he was considered, with David d'Angers, to be at the forefront of Romantic sculpture.

[3] O'Neddy, Philothée, *Feu et flamme*, pp. 9-13.

Known popularly as the 'blond Othello', O'Neddy was the literary pseudonym of Théophile Dondey, later Dondey de Santenay. The author of numerous works of short fiction and literary and theatrical criticism, in addition to a collection of poetry, *Feu et flamme* dating from his involvement with the 'Petit Cénacle' (see note 11 below), O'Neddy enjoyed some celebrity in the early 1830s, but finished his days as a civil servant, forsaking all but episodic contributions to literary periodicals. He has left an invaluable document concerning Borel's literary circle in a letter written to Charles Asselineau (see note 4).

[4] Asselineau, Charles, *Mélanges tirés d'une petite bibiliothèque romantique* (Paris: René Pincebourde, 1866), p. 137. Please note that I will respect nineteenth-century spelling in quotations. The penultimate consonant of a plural noun ending in a nasal vowel is often dropped, and the eighteenth-century spelling of the third person plural verb form, '-oient', is sometimes retained in early ninteenth-century works. I will indicate obviously erratic spellings, such as those often found in Borel's writing.

years of the 1830s, Balzac, at the time known primarily for his macabre *Contes bruns*, and *La peau de chagrin*, was widely classified by the press as a *bousingo*, as were Théophile Gautier and Gérard de Nerval. These latter two had published little work, and were viewed during the period as playing a second role to the leader of their literary group, Pétrus Borel.[5]

Borel is an author who is difficult if not impossible to understand fully without some clear conception of the political and literary context of his epoch. Crucial to Borel's project is the development of the literary myth of the *jeune-France*, the *bousingo*, and the fashion through which this myth altered the artists' views of public reception of their work and of the journalistic critical establishment, itself undergoing a period of rapid and fitful development. This cultural context serves as an introduction and preface to the study of the work of Pétrus Borel himself and of other minor Romantics. There was an ongoing and dynamic relationship between Borel and his group, on the one side, and the critical establishment, involving both professional, journalistic critics and creative artists acting as critics, on the other.

Thus, before embarking on a close reading of Borel's texts, or even before examining Borel's important polemical tracts, we must turn to a summary of the literary historical situation in the early 1830s. The foundation of Borel's ideas and literary strategies is found in these early debates.

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[5]See Introduction, p. iv. Additionally, Gautier, in his *Histoire du romantisme*, clearly identifies Borel as the leader of the 'Petit Cénacle': 'Il y a dans tout groupe une individualité pivotale, autour de laquelle les autres s'implantent et gravitent comme un système de planètes autour de leur astre.

Pétrus Borel était cet astre; nul de nous n'essaya de se soustraire à cette attraction; dès qu'on était entré dans le tourbillion, on tournait avec une satisfaction singulière comme si on eût accompli une loi de nature'. (Gautier, Théophile, *Histoire du romantisme*, p. 19)

The Beginnings of the *Jeune-France* Myth and the Newspaper Press 1829-32

Political and literary unrest flared up briefly and brilliantly in the first few years of the July Monarchy. Debate raged concerning the role of the artist in society from 1830 until 1834. The transition is a period of uneven literary evolution, characterized by fits of furious development and debate, followed moreover by a period of relative silence concerning the relationship between artist, critic and public. The study of the minor Romantic is indissociable from the study of the relationship between the literary world, the newspaper press, and the French government of the epoch. The years surrounding the ascent of Louis-Philippe to the French throne were characterized by a volatile and dynamic relationship between the government and the press. The links that tie members of the world of letters to the newspaper press at this time, and the links that tie those involved in journalism to the government, were repeatedly strained, broken and re-formed during a period of marked upheaval.[6] The dynamism of these relationships exercised a strong and constant pressure upon the world of letters.

Of principal interest to this study is the development within the press and elsewhere of a political and literary myth, that of the young and radical republicans of the early years of the July Monarchy, whose activities fell within the domains of art, journalism and politics simultaneously. The *jeune-France*, and later the *bousingo,* enjoyed great popularity from 1830-1834. Portraits in the popular press of these characters were at times synonymous with Borel's group and at times erroneously equated with it by the reading public. The caricature developed as an image of political

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[6]For details of the relationships between government and newspaper press during the period see Collins, Irene, *The Government and Newspaper Press in France, 1814-1881* (Oxford: OUP, 1959) in addition to Bellanger, Claude with Jacques Godechot, Pierre Guiral and Fernand Terrou, *Histoire générale de la presse française,* 2 vols. (Paris: PUF, 1969); and Séguin, Jean-Pierre, *Nouvelles à sensation, canards du XIXe siècle* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1959).

and aesthetic rebellion, and was quickly adopted as a term of debate: he was either an object of ridicule, or a model of behaviour. The myth attained tremendous proportions. For nearly two years, the *jeune-France* and later the *bousingo* were mentioned daily in *Le Figaro* and in *L'Artiste*. Entire reviews sprang up and fell around the image of the *jeune-France*. In the politically or aesthetically conservative press, he was blamed for riots and for the degradation of art. Among the original *jeunes-France* themselves, the artists of Borel's literary circle who bore some responsibility for the celebrity of the caricature, the hostility of political and journalistic institutions caused a complex reaction. What course of action should the artist take in view of an actively hostile and uncomprehending public, one upon whom the artist relies for support? In what manner should the artist portray his political convictions? In this reaction we shall see Borel's addressing of problems of literary identity, and his development of literary, rhetorical techniques to express an irony that misleads, yet engages, his reader.

The pre-history of Borel's group begins with scandal and insurrection in the press in the year prior to the Revolution of 1830. The Parisian newspapers bear great responsibility for the July Revolution. It was in a climate of instability that the *jeune-France* was born. Following the scheme of Villèle, Charles X's universally unpopular Minister of Finance, to gain financial control of ultra-royalist and opposition papers through infiltration and buy-outs, the antagonism between newspaper press and government worsened rapidly.[7] Villèle's scheme backfired horribly with his attempt to take over the *Quotidienne*, resulting in the editor, Michaud, publicly airing the details of the attempted sabotage to a wide readership in the capital, already poorly disposed toward the minister.[8] The political atmosphere was at once charged with scandal and yet so confused that literary weeklies such as *Le Figaro* and *Le Globe* began appearing daily

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[7]Villèle was the victim of one of Nerval's early, politically motivated, satirical poems 'Epître à M. de Villèle' first printed in the *Mercure* of 12 August, 1826. See de Nerval, Gérard, *Œuvres complètes* (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1989), vol. I, p. 197.

[8] Collins, Irene, *The Government and Newspaper Press in France, 1814-1881*, chapter 3.

in order to participate in the journalistic/political fray. Literature and politics became intertwined.

The literary debates of the 1830s were facilitated by political turmoil, and by the rapid growth of the press. Following the ascension of Louis-Philippe, subscription rates among the most popular periodical journals in Paris rose by an average of twenty percent.[9] The reading public was avid to follow not only developments in the new government, but the preponderant social demonstrations in Paris and similar activity abroad. Insurrections occurred in Italy, Poland, and Belgium; and in France widespread rioting took place with republicans and socialists, disappointed at the turn of political events, vandalising first Saint-Germain l'Auxerrois, and later Saint-Merri. Both riots, the second being a tentative revolution, were quelled with gunfire.

Certain elements of the press settled into the new regime with little hesitation. Much of the liberal press showed loyalty to Louis-Philippe for a short time following the Revolution. *La Charte* was revised to contain two provisions appealing to the newspaper press: one affirming 'le droit des français de publier et de faire imprimer leurs opinions en se conformant aux lois' and the other assuring that 'la censure ne pourra jamais être rétablie'.[10] Nevertheless, any sense of optimism was short lived: opposition persisted among the legitimist and republican papers; with the appointment of Périer as head of government, the liberal press realised that its demands for democratic measures at home and revolutionary advances abroad were to be ignored, and before long, disappointment among literary and journalistic circles was widespread.[11]

Myriad radical papers sprang up between 1829 and 1830, and papers that had been politically non-committal chose sides. A short-lived journal founded by Plagniol

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[9]Bellanger, Claude, et. al., *Histoire générale de la presse française,* vol. I, p. 100.

[10]Ibid., vol. I, p. 101.

[11]Collins, op. cit., p. 69.

entitled *La Jeune France* had a remarkable effect on the political tone of other journals throughout the country, and foreshadowed the synthesis of artistic and political ideas that the *jeune-France* Romantic would later come to represent.[12] Plagniol touted his republicanism, and published articles on utopian socialism, and the metamorphosis of society reflected in and facilitated by Romantic art. Financial loss caused Plagniol to stop printing only a few months after the first issue, but papers throughout the country had already begun to carry a progressive artistic and republican message in the wake of the paper's scandal: the lyonnais *Précurseur*, *Le Courrier de la Moselle*, *L'Album de la Creuse*[13], in addition to *L'Ami de la Charte*, the *Mercure ségusien*, *L'Aviso de la méditerranée*, and the *Gazette Constitutionnel de l'Allier*[14] all began to promote republican ideas that had apparently lain dormant for nearly a decade. The sudden involvement of literary journals in politics, and the appearance of radical political journals throughout the country signalled the beginning of a period where artistic discussion was often dominated by a certain segment of the young Romantic movement, which took its cues from Plagniol's *La Jeune France*. The term had existed in the early 1820s in a strictly political sense, but subsequent to Plagniol's polemical articles, *jeune-France* came to signify the most provocative and outrageous proponents of artistic and political innovation. Despite the journal's swift eclipse, its melange of literary and political radicalism became a standard focus among young artists during the first three years of the 1830s.

Plagniol's goal in the journal, and one of the reasons for its renown among the young generation, despite its commercial failure, was to link political, philosophical and

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[12]'Il sied de signaler par ailleurs l'activité militante de petites feuilles qui viennent surgir ou s'apprêtent à le faire : outre *La Silhouette* et ses célèbres caricatures [fondée en juin 1829 [...] Balzac y collabora], *La Jeune France* de Plagniol (juin, 1829), vite moribonde, qui prônait "le républicanisme"[...]' (Bellanger, Claude et. al., op. cit., vol. I, p. 94.

[13]Weill, G., *Histoire du parti républicain en France* (Paris: F. Alcan, 1928), pp. 17-18.

[14]*La Jeune France*, vol. I, 9, 20 July 1829, p. 77.

artistic innovation. His republican ideas were interwoven with theories on progress in the sciences and the arts. Plagniol's creed in the *Jeune France* was to keep pace with innovation in the sciences, in philosophy, politics and literature, incorporating these elements within the rapidly evolving political and ethical landscape. Plagniol outlines his goals in the preface to the first issue:

> Au milieu de l'immense révolution que les événemens ont opérée dans les esprits, on remarque avec peine, qu'à défaut d'organes et d'unité, les idées nouvelles, encore incertaines, sont retardées dans leur marche et leurs progrès [...] nous déclarons que tous nos soins seront employés à consulter et à suivre le mouvement des idées, pour en résumer les principes dans l'intérêt commun.[15]

Plagniol responded to an impetus that was felt by many journals of the period to keep pace with political developments that necessarily exercised a strong pressure on other facets of culture. Although Plagniol's editorial introduction focuses on progress in the arts and sciences in addition to politics, political concerns underlie the majority of articles devoted to other subjects. The paper juxtaposes socialist articles, notably on the equitable redistribution of wealth,[16] attacks on the regime of Charles X, reprints of utopian socialist tracts and republican polemicising along with the reviews of scientific and artistic innovation.

Numerous articles in the *Jeune-France* proclaim Romantic innovation in the arts as a sign of imminent political change. Plagniol views art as the expression of the most typical ideas of a certain moral and political state of society. According to him, aesthetics are inextricable from politics, and thus artistic revolution signals political revolution:

> Le beau, dans les arts, est l'expression poétique des idées qui dominent un état de civilisation; chaque civilisation a ses idées qui la dominent : de là, autant de

[15]Ibid., vol. I, 1, June 10, 1829 p. 1.

[16]Ibid., 1, p. 2.

> révolutions dans l'histoire de l'art qu'on en compte dans l'histoire de l'humanité.[17]

Logically, Plagniol endorses Romantic innovation in the arts, and sees in the Romantic phenomenon the manifestation of society's desire for a form of art that accommodates what he defines as the natural tendencies of man, particularly the expression of individual dignity. For Plagniol, in the terms of the polemics of Romanticism, classicism represents political as well as aesthetic tyranny: classicism finds its origins in Nero and the tyranny of imperial Rome. In the focus on individual expression in Romantic art, Plagniol sees a political as well as artistic harbinger.

In an article entitled 'De l'influence du soleil sur la poésie' he responds to the rhetorical question, 'Can Romanticism be considered a new school?'[18] He states that Romanticism cannot be considered so much a new school, but an extension of moral progress, inevitable since the Revolution of 1789, and is thus a new means of expression of already existing political ideas. Art corresponds to the climate of ideas within a culture and, according to Plagniol, the desire for republican government is consequently already expressed in facets of contemporary French society:

> Croyance innée chez les hommes, le républicanisme qui, sous diverses formes, semble dominer les esprits, est parvenu à jeter quelques-uns de ses principes dans les institutions actuelles.[19]

The aesthetic emphases of Romanticism are proof for Plagniol of a recognition among artists of the innate value of the individual, and thus of a climate of ideas that would welcome more democratic political change. Conversely, because republicanism responds to a 'croyance innée chez les hommes,' only through giving free course to individual

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[17]Ibid., 5, p. 35.

[18]Ibid., 1, p. 6.

[19]Ibid., 3, p. 1.

expression is great art created. The most important art, according to his republican aesthetic, does not correspond to the dicates of a school, but is based upon the free expression of individual sentiment:

> Chaque homme est un système parfait de poésie. Sa rhétorique est tout entière dans sa manière de sentir et de rendre. C'est en se laissant aller, en se laissant faire que Chénier s'est trouvé grand poète, et Géricault peintre sublime.[20]

Thus, the great contemporary poets are models of an individualistic and democratic ideal, stemming indirectly from the principles of the Revolution of 1789.

The emphasis on moral and political progress accommodates the ideas of utopian socialists, particularly those of Saint-Simon; sections of his memoirs are often reprinted in the journal.[21] In addition, the journal adopts certain of Saint-Simon's ideas on cultural evolution. In the article entitled 'Révolutions de l'Art--de l'état de la littérature en France'[22], the journal adopts Saint-Simon's view that society passes through 'organic' and 'critical' phases, dependent upon political developments and the cultural climate. These phases exercise a strong, though indirect, influence on the reception and interpretation of art. Although the analysis of these terms is not profound, their usage serving a polemical rather than analytical function, the ideas of Saint-Simon exercise a certain influence on the generation of Romantics beginning their literary careers in the wake of the July Revolution. As we shall see, such social experiments as communal living were common among the *jeune-France* Romantics, and Borel employed historical models that borrowed liberally from the ideas of Saint-Simon, Ballanche and Joseph de Maistre, when constructing his novel, *Madame Putiphar.*

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[20]Ibid., 1, p. 6.

[21]Ibid. 7, 10 July 1829, p. 50.

[22]Ibid., 5, 30 June, 1829, p. 35

In addition, certain more ephemeral, stylistic aspects of the journal foreshadow tendencies among the young *littérateurs* of the following three or four years. 1829 was the year of the *roman charogne*, the French hybrid of the Gothic novel, under the influence of Radcliffe, Lewis, and recent very popular translations in France of Hoffman[23]; the genre flourished from 1829 through the first half of the 1830s. 1829 also saw the publication of Jules Janin's *L'âne mort et la femme guillotinée*[24], in addition to Hugo's *Le dernier jour d'un condamné*, and Nodier's *Smarra*, all works with morbid, violent or gothic overtones. The popularity of Hugo's *Han d'Islande* was undiminshed. The work served as one of the principal influences on the French charnel-house school. The genre would be continued with Borel's *Champavert, contes immoraux*, and *Madame Putiphar*, Balzac's *Contes bruns*, the short, fantastic fiction of Alphonse Brot, Philarète Chasles, and Gautier, particularly in the latter's *Mademoiselle de Maupin* and *La Comédie de la mort*.

Remarkable in the *Jeune France* is the graphically vivid and at times macabre language and imagery, such as in the series of articles on Parisian history, where the focus lies on the secret and bloody past of famous Parisian monuments. One such article treats the history of the Marché des Innocents, formerly the cemetery.[25] Here is the occasion to write of cadavers and misery, infectious vapours, disease and debauchery,

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[23]See Castex, Pierre-Georges, *Le conte fantastique en France* (Paris: José-Corti, 1987), particularly chapter three. Hoffman seems to have first come to the attention of the French literary world in 1828 through a short lived journal, *Le Gymnase*, which included among its collaborators Balzac and Loève-Weimars. Hoffman's popularity grew rapidly, and he was held in particularly high esteem by the *jeune-France* Romantics.

[24]Jules Janin was well known as a literary and dramatic critic during the 1830s and later, but his debuts in literature began with the frenzied *jeunes-France* genre. He was lionised by the young romantics of the early 1830s, as depicted in the 'Bol de punch' episode of Gautier's *Les jeunes-France, romans goguenards*. His popularity was such at the time that Gautier describes the young romantics as dividing themselves into tribes, the 'hugolâtres' and the 'janinophiles'. He subsequently published another popular novel in the *roman charogne* style entitled *Barnave* in 1831, but, as with other authors who took part in the morbid fashions of the late 1820s and early 1830s, particularly Léon Gozlan, poet and later a regular contributor to the *Figaro*, Janin distanced himself quickly from the literary excess of his youth. His critique in the *Figaro* in 1839 of Borel's *Madame Putiphar*, a late and important addition to the *roman charogne* genre, was nothing short of scathing. See Ch. 4, note 4.

[25]*La Jeune France*, vol. I, 18, 5 September, 1829, p. 141.

following the style of the day. The same is true of the article on *La Place de Grève et l'Hotel de Ville*:

> La voilà cette place sur laquelle déjà tant de têtes ont tombé, sur laquelle tant d'autres tomberont encore peut-être! Que de fois le sang a rougi ce pavé! Que de fois la populace a rugi d'un plaisir atroce dans cette enceinte de la mort! Que d'innocens condamnés ont senti le froid du couteau triangulaire, tandis que les vrais coupables observaient en souriant, cachés dans la foule [...][26]

Though execution of the innocent is a common theme, there is a striking similarity between this vision of the Place de Grève and the final scenes of Pétrus Borel's short story, 'Monsieur de l'Argentière, l'accusateur'[27], in which the public prosecutor, de l'Argentière, watches the execution for infanticide of the woman he raped, and whom he successfully prosecuted in court. Just as Gothic and morbid description is linked with recent historical fact in the articles by Plagniol, so too will they be repeated in Borel's short fiction and his only novel, *Madame Putiphar*. Comparison has been made between the Gothic tendencies of Borel and his group, and the importation of Gothic fiction from abroad. However, the historical sources of Gothic fiction in French during this period are more recent and more evident than in the vast majority of English and German works.[28] Historical verisimilitude in the French work is evidence of the extent to which contemporary events acted upon literature.

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[26]Ibid., 16, p. 127.

[27]Borel, Pétrus, *Champavert, contes immoraux* (Paris: Editions des Autres, 1979), p. 41.

[28]One can understand the gothic genre of fiction in France as inspired in part by the historical tumult of the late eighteenth century. As the Marquis de Sade affirmed in his *Idée sur les romans*, popular insurrection placed the people in opposition to the institutions that had for so long provided societal structure: the church and the monarchy became villainous where they had once provided stability and guidance (Sade, D. A. F., *Idée sur les romans* (Paris: Edouard Rouveyre, 1878), p. 322). For the English, the same may be said of the revolution of 1688 'qui consacrait le rejet définitif du catholicisme.' (Lévy, Maurice, *Le roman 'gothique' anglais* (Toulouse: Espic, 1968), p. 609), although in the case of the late 18th-century English gothic, in the works of Lewis, Radcliffe and Walpole, the historical sources are far removed from any contemporary strife. The English gothic relies on a largely fantastic or anachronistic decor, while the French works often portray recent atrocities. This subject will be further discussed in the context of de Sade and Borel's *Madame Putiphar*.

In addition, raucous celebration and self-destructive debauchery were much in vogue during the period, and often took on satanic, medieval and literary Gothic overtones. The 'Galop infernal' among other riotous dances was popular among the youth[29], and was danced at the Romantic soirée recounted in Gautier's *Les Jeunes France.* The episode was based on an actual party thrown by Borel, Gautier and their comrades in a house in the former *rue d'Enfer.*[30] Plagniol's review of a recent ball, 'Le Bal des folles', includes descriptions of bloodstained tableclothes and skeletal guards.[31] He paints the picture of a sea of sweaty bodies and disheveled heads, referring to the event as 'la fête satanique'. The description is entirely fantastic, and one wonders naturally if the event is not fictitious until the final line, giving the date and locale, the amphithéâtre de Charenton. Such raucous fêtes continued after 1830, and were an expression of the charged atmosphere of Paris following the July Revolution: from 1830-1834 political insurrection, spontaneous riots, the cholera epidemic all contributed to an atmosphere of uncertainty and fear, the tension of which was discharged in the sort of revelry described in Gautier's *Histoire du romantisme*, as well as *Les Jeunes-France, romans goguenards* and in Philothée O'Neddy's *Feu et flamme*. Enid Starkie attributes the almost self-destructive revelry to a form of escape from the fear of the cholera epidemic of 1831-32;[32] but one must also remark on the existence of these same morbid preoccupations in the literature prior to the July Revolution. In the description of the *jeune-France* soirée in Gautier's *Les Jeunes-France, romans goguenards*, the young people imitate the actions of their literary heroes, taking the models of their debauchery from the works of Hugo and Janin, who were themselves under the strong influence of

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[29]See Starkie, Enid, *Pétrus Borel, the Lycanthrope* (London: Faber and Faber, 1954), chapter 3.

[30]Gautier, Theophile, *Les Jeunes-Frances, romans goguenards*, p. 211. See also Privat d'Anglemont, Alexandre, *Paris anecdoté* (Paris: P. Jannet, 1854), pp. 184-93.

[31]*La Jeune France*, vol. I, 1, p. 3.

[32]Starkie, Enid, *Pétrus Borel, the Lycanthrope*, ibid.

the English gothic and medieval works.[33] As much as they stem from the contemporary malaise, they may also be attributed to the influence of French translations of foreign, Gothic fiction in the 1820s.

Although *La Jeune France* was not a widely distributed paper, and although it was relatively short lived, its influence on a highly active facet of the Romantic movement is certain. Two of the contributors were Léon Gozlan and Gustave Planche. Both went on to write criticism for the *Revue des deux mondes*, and for *L'Artiste*. Both were involved in the debates between Classics and Romantics, and in the debates on the artist's role in society. Gozlan went on to become a popular novelist and dramaturge through the 1840s; and he is the most likely writer to have authored the anonymous and biting series of caricatures of the *jeunes-France* in the *Figaro* of 1830.

Even before the July Revolution, animosity between the journalistic, and in consequence the literary world, on the one hand, and the government on the other, was severe, and the climate within literary circles facilitated political speculation and idealism. Plagniol's journal tapped a strong vein of sentiment among its young readers, and, as we shall see, his synthesis of political and artistic ideas determined the foundations of the literary *jeune-France* creed.

The Development of the Caricature of the *Jeunes-France* and *Bousingos* and its Impact Upon the Literary Debates of the Early 1830s

In the midst of political and journalistic turmoil, the Romantic revolution in art was in full swing. Enthusiasm among young literary aspirants, particularly those in the

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[33]Gautier, Théophile, *Les Jeunes-France*, p. 222.

group known as the 'Petit cénacle' or the literary circle that gravitated around the leadership of the young Théophile Gautier and Pétrus Borel, ran extremely high:

> [...] ces jeunes hommes, jetés dans la mêlée littéraire sous les chauds soleils des trois années de flamme et de fièvre, 1830, 31, 32; années orageuses où les grandes batailles du théâtre alternaient avec les grandes turbulences de la rue; où les mêmes étaient prêts pour combattre à Saint-Merri où à *Lucrèce Borgia*.[34]

Both Borel and Gautier played major roles in the organisation of the *claque* for the premier of *Hernani*[35], and their friends were among the horde of supporters that militated in favour of the play. Furthermore, as we have seen, the pressures exerted upon the literary and journalistic worlds by political turmoil meant that a synthesis between artistic and political ideas was inevitable. Plagniol's *Jeune France* led the way, but it was Borel's group that would come face to face with the difficulties of espousing a melange of art and politics in a climate of political uncertainty, and would subsequently come to a deeper understanding of the problems of defining the artist's role in society. Charles Asselineau, in his memoirs of the Romantic period, remarks on this particular and short-lived deviation in Romanticism:

> Pétrus Borel marque une phase, ou plutôt une déviation du Romantisme, produite par l'invasion de la politique dans la littérature, après la révolution de Juillet. Cette phase a eu son symbole, son type, le *Bousingo* (ou Bousingot) [...], avec son gilet à la Robespierre, sa grosse canne, sa longue barbe et ses longs cheveux, coiffée tantôt de la casquette rouge à chainette, tantot du chapeau ciré. Le Bousingot transporta dans la vie politique le style et les allures de l'école Romantique. Ce fut une variété du genre Jeune-France, mais aussi rude, aussi cynique que les autres étaient *dandies* et raffinés. En véritable artiste, il trouva tout de suite et avec génie la plastique de son idée. La passion de la couleur et de la *localité* avait poussé les écrivains romantiques vers le luxe et l'éclat. Le Bousingot plongea dans la crapule et affecta les habitudes populacières. Il opposa le *brule-gueule* et le *petit bleu* aux narguilehs et aux hanaps. Des mêmes fusées, des mêmes soleils de métaphores qui se tiraient ailleurs en l'honneur des marchésines et des cathédrales, il fit des cartouches pour tirer sur le roi et sur les sergents de la ville; mais c'était bien au fond le même procédé et la même poétique. Romantiques et bousingots se rattachaient d'ailleurs par un point

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[34]des Essarts, Emmanuel, *Les Voyages de l'esprit* (Paris: E. Maillet, 1869), pp. 125-6.

[35]See Gautier's *Histoire du romantisme* Chs. XI and XII in addition to Jasinski, René, *Les Années romantiques de Théophile Gautier* (Paris: Vuibert, 1929), p. 88, note 1: 'Hugo traitait de [Borel] comme avec un homme qui disposait de trois cents mains'; and Clarétie, Jules, op. cit., p. 27.

> commun: la haine du bourgeois et l'horreur de la platitude. Les esprits les plus distingués de l'école subirent cette épidémie de la politique.[36]

Borel was at the centre of an innovative and politically aware literary circle that was identified by much of the conservative press and the reading public as interchangeable with the *bousingo*, or the young, republican 'conspirator' with literary pretensions. Even Asselineau, well-informed as he was on the history of Romanticism, associates Borel and his group with the *bousingo*, and thus with political agitation, something that members of the 'Petit cénacle' would deny repeatedly, avowing only a concern with the role of the artist in society, and not with any concrete political aim.[37] Upon further inspection, it becomes clear that the appellations *jeunes-France* and *bousingo* were by no means synonymous, despite the confusion of recent critics.[38] The two terms are linked in their description of young Romantics, but the emphasis on either politics or on literature came to distinguish the terms.

Le Figaro of 1831 devoted a remarkable number of articles to the discussion of the *jeunes-France* and related phenomena. Numerous articles treated the recurrent riots involving students and workers in the spring and summer of that same year.[39] Strangely, the criticism directed at student agitators was not as one-sided as is argued by Francis Dumont in his study *Nerval et les bousingots.*[40] Dumont suggests that recent government

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[36]Asselineau, Charles, *Mélanges tirés d'une petite bibiliothèque romantique*, p. 28.

[37]While it is true that the young Nerval engaged in political poetry, this was prior to his engagement with Borel. The other artists of the 'Petit Cénacle', while responding to the political agitation of the period, claimed that their interests lay entirely in the realm of art, as is apparent in the preface to Gautier's *Les Jeunes France*, and in the verse of both O'Neddy's *Feu et flamme* and as we shall see in Borel's *Rhapsodies*. See also note 55, below.

[38]No recent critic has apparently paid much heed to the difference between *jeune-France* and *bousingo*, or to the evolution of the public conception of the artist that such a difference represents. Enid Starkie outlines very briefly the various artistic appellations applied to Borel's group, and traces the terms in the order that they came to supplant one another in the public vocabulary without examining the nuances. (For a brief discussion of the terms see Starkie, Enid, *Pétrus Borel, the Lycanthrope*, pp. 89-95) Other critics, such as Jean-Luc Steinmetz, Bruno Pompili, and Francis Dumont, use the terms almost interchangeably.

[39]*Le Figaro*, April-June 1831 mentions student riots at least once in every issue.

[40]Dumont, Francis, *Nerval et les bousingots* (Paris: Editions de la Table Ronde, 1958), p. 16. Dumont mentions certain articles in *Le Figaro* concerning the *jeunes-France*, but his list leaves out many articles

subsidies led *Le Figaro* to take a conservative stand with regard to political insurgents. In fact, the number of articles in the paper ridiculing the overreactions of the government in tracking down and persecuting would-be insurgents is nearly equal to the number ridiculing the insurgents themselves.[41]

These articles from the *Figaro* are, incidentally, indicative of an actual program on the part of the government to crack down on the riotous element, a program that involved the persecution of numerous members of Borel's literary circle, and which garnered the mistrust and animosity of those same artists. The *bousingo*, or the more political offspring of the *jeune-France*, participated heavily in the recurrent riots of the period, culminating in the massacre of Saint-Merri. An explicit account of the merciless government pursuit of the participants in the Saint-Merri insurgency can be found in George Sand's *Horace.*[42] An article in the *Figaro* concerning the arrest of three young poets for singing seditious songs after an evening of carousing corroborates the testimonial of Philothée O'Neddy and the account in the *Revue anecdotique.*[43] In addition, Nerval was arrested for apparently unwitting complicity in the riot of the *rue des Prouvaires*,[44] and Borel was detained by the police for having 'la démarche

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devoted to the subject. He is apparently unaware of the continuation of the caricature in the form of the *bousingo* the following year.

[41] 'Objections d'un citoyen paisible', *Le Figaro*, 22 April, 1831, is typical of the articles in which the government is humorously reprimanded for its excessive zeal in persecuting those suspected of seditious activities. Such articles appear almost weekly for the following three months with titles such as 'Le Cauchemar du juste milieu' (referring to the political focus of the Louis-Philippe regime; the *juste milieu* quickly became a term of ridicule), 'Le conspirateur de bric à brac', referring to the innocuous nature of the vast majority of supposed conspirators, and 'La peste', comparing the *juste milieu* to the recent outbreak of cholera, Paris under the shadow of two plagues.

[42] Sand, George, *Horace* (Poissy: Imprimerie d'Arbieu, Lejay et Cie., 1869), pp. 298-329.

[43] O'Neddy, Philothée, *Lettre inédite de Philothée O'Neddy* (Bassac: Plein Chant, 1993), p. 13 and *La Revue anecdotique des excentricités contemporaines*, vol. XI, (1859), p. 265. The *Figaro* writes of the arrest of three young poets, 'Rapsodes de la rue', charged with sedition. Borel had recently published his collection of poetry, *Rhapsodies*, and was referred to frequently as 'le rhapsode' or 'rapsode'. The poets, among whom was Borel, were apparently chanting 'Vive Bouchardy!', referring to their companion and playwright. Local sergeants heard instead 'Vive Charles X!' Some of the artists, including Nerval, spent a short time in prison, but no charges were pressed.

[44] Nerval was implicated in a plan to riot outside the *Bal des Tuileries* in 1830, where many high functionaries of the July Monarchy would have been in attendance. The plot was hatched by a mob in the *rue des Prouvaires*, where Nerval claimed to have been by simple chance on the night of the incident. He was

républicaine'.[45] Government persecution of political conspirators often accidentally targeted literary bohemians.

The articles in the *Figaro* concerning the *jeunes-France* indicate two things: firstly, the articles' frequency, and the frequency of reference to the whole *jeune-France* phenomenon show the level of popularity of the subject, and secondly, the tenacity and bitterness with which they are attacked demonstrate the conception, or misconception, that the public had constructed of the young artists. It is important to note that the author of the articles concerning the *jeunes-France* is almost certainly Léon Gozlan, friend of Plagniol, poet, and regular contributor to the *Jeune France* of 1829, who continued his career with the *Figaro* and with other papers after the demise of Plagniol's venture.[46]

There is good evidence that the articles in the *Figaro* were directed primarily at Borel's group. One indication of the specific target of its attacks can be found in an article of 15 July 1831 entitled 'Les Porcs et les bonnes études'. The author indicates that a young man suffering from 'lycanthropie', a *monsieur P---*, has set up a primitive farm on a hill in Paris in the hope of leading a simple life raising pigs. The joke is unequivocal. *Monsieur P---* is certainly Pétrus Borel, whose claim to 'lycanthropic', or savagely anarchic, republicanism in the preface to his volume of poetry *Rhapsodies* led to instant celebrity.[47] The article corresponds to the period when Borel, along with other

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arrested, and again spent a short time in the prison of Sainte-Pélagie (Dumont, Francis, *Nerval et les bousingots*, pp. 24 & 98).

[45]Marie, Aristide, *Pétrus Borel, sa vie et son œuvre*, p. 105.

[46]Though the authorship remains unproven, the language in the articles by Gozlan from *La Jeune France* and those parodying the *jeunes-France* in *Le Figaro* is very similar. It appears logical that Gozlan would have an interest in attacking the usurpers of a literary identity that he had created along with Plagniol. The ideas set forth in the *Jeune-France* of 1829 were altogether serious, and the irony and exaggeration of Borel's group would have appeared as doing little credit to the defunct review. It was common for others involved in the literary and political fringe of the late 1820s to distance themselves from their previous positions once they had settled into a secure and serious journalistic career. Gozlan and Jules Janin are two examples.

[47]Borel, Pétrus, *Rhapsodies* (Paris: Editions 'La Force Française', 1922), p. 9. The name 'lycanthrope' was immediately taken up by literary critics in a sarcastic tone. Borel became best known for his polemical verve and mock political posturing. See note 100, below.

members of his literary circle, set up what they called 'le camp des Tartares' on a hill at the top of what is now the boulevard Rochechouart in imitation of the commune of Saint-Simon in Ménilmontant, a primitive commune where Borel and his comrades grew vegetables and practiced nudism until they were evicted by the municipality after numerous complaints from the neighbours.[48]

The *Figaro* was well aware of the activities of the members of the 'Petit Cénacle' as was the reading public, and they were the focus of a series of articles beginning on 30 August with 'Les Jeunes France'.[49] The article describes the *jeune-France* as being born when painting and writing met in the Romantic movement: the typical *jeune-France* is a descriptive writer, beginning each sentence with 'C'est'; 'il hait le verbe'. The literary artists of Borel's group maintained a strong connection with a brotherhood of painters and lithographers living in the now famous residence in the rue Childebert.[50] The *jeune-France*'s writing is reminiscent of Lamartine, though frenzied and more morbid. He adopts the physically descriptive and sensorial emphasis in Romantic verse popular since Hugo's *Les Orientales* that would continue in the exoticism of Gautier and Nerval. According to the *Figaro*, the *jeune-France* worships exoticism and wild coloration, adopts popular manners and champions the 'peuple' while secretly scorning them, drinks heavily, holds naive political ideas, and yet engages in grandiose speculation on the downfall of the current regime and the establishment of a republic. The caricature corresponds fairly accurately to an artist incorporating the ideas of Plagniol, and finds a less sarcastic but nevertheless lightly self-parodic echo in the previously cited poem 'Pandaemonium' by Philothée O'Neddy, recounting the debauchery and philosophical and artistic musings of a *jeune-France* soirée (see note 3).

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[48]Gautier, Théophile, *Histoire du romantisme*, see also *La Revue anecdotique*, IX, (1859), pp. 265-7 and Montifaud, Marc, *Les romantiques* (Paris: Reiff, 1878), p. 177.

[49]*Le Figaro*, 30 August, 1831.

[50]The house in the rue Childebert housed numerous generations of Romantic painters. Those connected with Borel's 'Petit Cénacle' were the Johannot brothers, the Devéria brothers and Célestin Nanteuil.

In the following *Figaro* articles, all facets of the *jeunes-France* life-style are explored in minute detail. The *jeune-France* tastes in all matters reflect literary fashion and republican political conviction. His meals are inedible gothic feasts where metaphor triumphs over appetite.[51] His furniture is a hodgepodge of medieval relics, republican symbols and macabre conversation pieces: he owns daggers, a pickled fœtus in a jar, and a letter from Tripoli handled by six hundred cholera victims.[52]

The *Figaro* developed the *jeune-France* caricature over the following four months with a total of eleven articles dedicated entirely to the description of the *jeune-France* phenomenon, and with daily articles touching on the subject.[53] Numerous references are made that attach the *jeune-France* closely with the 'Petit cénacle'[54], although, ironically, the editorship of the *Figaro* claimed almost exclusive responsibility for the development of the myth. In a humorous letter published on 1 September, 1831, entitled 'Lettre d'un Jeune France à Figaro', obviously written by the author of the previous caricatures, the imaginary *jeune-France* admits his hatred of journalism, ascribing his resentment to the fact that '[le journalisme] nous a faits et nous a défaits'. The false letter underlines the fact that the artist's personality, his intentions, and the minutest details of his dress and habits were appropriated by the press, inflated and distorted for the amusement of the public.

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[51]*Le Figaro*, 10 September, 1831, 'Les Festins des Jeunes France'.

[52]*Le Figaro*, 12 September, 1831, 'L'Ameublement des Jeunes-France'.

[53]The articles include 'Les Jeunes France', 30 August; 'Lettre d'un Jeune France à Figaro',1 September; 'Les Dames Jeunes France', 3 September; 'Le Festin des Jeunes-France', 10 September; 'Ameublement des Jeunes-France', 12 September; 'Le Jeune France en voyage', 4 October; 'L'Emeutier', 21 October; 'Les Chapeaux de cuir', 24 October; 'Les Cuisiniers Jeunes France', 24 October; and 'De Quelques mots neufs' 2 November, treating *jeune-France* vocabulary. Note that the articles 'L'Emeutier' and 'Les Chapeaux de cuir' treat the appearance of a new and more political form of *jeune-France*, later to be called the *bousingo*.

[54]Note the description from the article 'Ameublement des Jeunes France', which includes the *jeune-France* apartment. In one room he keeps his curiosities, a stuffed crocodile hanging from the ceiling and a fœtus in a jar. These were among the decorations in Gautier's apartment, to which he makes reference in *Les Jeunes France, romans goguenards*.

The series of caricatures could not but incense the artists of Borel's group, yet, at the same time, it was the popularity of such caricature that was responsible for much of their celebrity. The subject is taken up in other papers as well, and particularly under the politically volatile form of the *bousingo*, first described in two later articles of the *Figaro*'s *jeune-France* series, and, in 1832, meriting a series of caricatures even more ridiculous than those of 1831.

The *bousingo* was, as Asselineau described him, a less refined, more politically active, and certainly more dangerous cousin of the *jeune-France*. Philothée O'Neddy, in an open letter to Charles Asselineau, differentiates the more peaceful and artistically minded *jeunes-France* of his group from the *bousingos*. He attributes the confusion of the two names to '[une] mauvaise plaisanterie du cru des bourgeois'.[55] Nevertheless, Borel's group appears again to have been a focus of the new caricature in the *Figaro.*[56] The artists of Borel's group did little to enlighten the bourgeoisie concerning their error, and, as will become evident, aggravated the misinterpetation through irony and exaggeration.

The *bousingo* was the subject of twelve articles running in the *Figaro*, beginning in February 1832, and ending in February of 1833.[57] A longer-lived phenomenon, the *bousingo* captured the public imagination, and appeared widely in pamphlets and popular caricatures. Unlike the *jeune-France*, the *bousingo* had little to do in reality with Borel

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[55]O'Neddy, Philothée, *Lettre inédite de Philothée O'Neddy*, p. 12.

[56]An article of 27 March entitled 'Liberté', caricaturing the *bousingo* demand for liberty to the point of amorality, appears timed as a satirical attack on the goals of the newly founded journal 'La Liberté', the work of Borel and Jehan Duseigneur, in which the contributors militate in favour of freedom from the censure of a professionally interested journalistic establishment and an aesthetically conservative Academy.

[57]In the *Figaro* of 9 February, 1832 appeared the article 'Le Bousingot' followed on 13 February by 'Biographie du Bousingot'; 18 February, 'Le Bousingot Père de Famille'; 22 February, 'Les Badouillards'; 27 February, 'La Liberté selon le Bousingot';19 March, 'Le Bousingot Fashionable'; 20 March, 'Le Tour de France du Bousingot'; 27 March, 'Liberté'; 6 May, 'Eloquence et Improvisation du Bousingot'; 24 May, 'Les Bonnets Rouges'; 5 September, 'Le Bousingo de Province'; 29 September, 'Une Variété du Bousingot: Le Lazarone'.

and his group, but because of the similarity in dress and apparent political conviction, was again closely associated with it.

Gozlan first described the *bousingo* as an offshoot of the *jeune-France* in an article entitled 'Les Chapeaux de Cuir' in the 24 October 1831 edition of the *Figaro*. The *bousingo* differentiated himself from the *jeune-France* by his leather hat:

> Enfin parut le cuir bouilli, naturalisé au Palais-Royal, par les volontaires havrais. Ce fut un délire chez les Jeunes-France. Voyez! avoir l'air matelot et néerlandais: avoir l'air voyageur, artiste à pied qui sue, porte un sac et un album, et gobe de la poussière, quelle étendue!...Voilà qui est beau et neuf, et magellanique.[58]

The word apparently springs from the name of the hat worn by the Havrais volunteers, appropriately called a 'bousingot'. George Sand exhaustively describes the *bousingo* phenomenon in her work *Horace*, and yet her model of the 'roi des bousingots', Laravinière, bears little resemblance to the predominantly artistic personalities of Borel's group. Sand's *bousingo* had foregone literary ideas to concentrate on political conspiracy, but shared much in the way of dress and language with the Romantic militants of aesthetic reform. In fact, there was little other than unconventional dress sense that directly identified the artists of Borel's group with the leather-capped political insurgents, although this was perhaps enough for a poorly informed public to confuse the two. Part of the confusion has also been ascribed to an episode when, after a night of carousing, Borel and his friends wandered through the streets, arm in arm, chanting, 'Nous allons faire du bousin' or 'Nous allons faire du bousingo', meaning 'noise' in the popular slang of the period.[59] As mentioned before, Philothée O'Neddy states that the group of artists was never known by any name other than that of 'les jeunes-France', and the proposed book of short stories, *Les Contes du Bousingo*, for which Nerval wrote 'La

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[58]*Le Figaro*, 24 October, 1831, p. 3.

[59]O'Neddy, Philothée, *Lettre inédite de Philothée O'Neddy*, p. 12.

Main de gloire' and Gautier 'Onuphrius', was supposed to clear the misconception, and at the same time offer the bourgeoisie 'une leçon d'orthographe'. Later, both spellings, *bousingo* and *bousingot*, became interchangeable, yet their origins remain separate.

Certain sources of the period are careful to differentiate the more peaceful literary *bousingos* from their riotous though outwardly similar counterparts. Lucien de la Hodde, a former *bousingo* turned police informer, in his work which navigates the plethora of insurrectional or merely eccentric youth groups that sprang up in the early 1830s, *Histoire des sociétés secrètes*, marks a difference between the politically active dissidents, and their less volatile, literary counterparts.[60] According to de la Hodde, the politically active *bousingo* was the 'type de l'étudiant qui n'étudie pas; de première force à la danse de la Chaumière.'[61] The 'Chaumière' refers to the ball for dignitaries of the July Monarchy held in the Tuileries Gardens against which the demonstration at the *rue des Prouvaires* was to be a protest. In contradistinction to the politically active student, de la Hodde mentions the primarily literary type:

> A ces étudiants émeutiers se rattache un autre type de bousingot, ce sont les collaborateurs de quelques petites feuilles dont les lazzi grossiers ou les dessins malpropres font pâmer d'aise les patriotes et les imbéciles.[62]

In addition, Alexandre Privat d'Anglemont, in his collection of observations on Parisian life of the period, *Paris anecdoté*, remarks the division between Romantics of the early 1830s that produced the *jeune-France* and the *bousingo*:

> La révolution de juillet arriva au milieu des grandes disputes des classiques et des romantiques. Elle vint faire diversion à cette nouvelle querelle des anciens et des modernes. Les habitants de la Childebert se divisèrent en *Bousingots* et en *Jeunes-France*.[63]

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[60]de la Hodde, Lucien, *Histoire des Sociétés Secrètes*, (Paris: 1850).

[61]Ibid., p. 25.

[62]Ibid.

[63]Privat d'Anglemont, *Paris anecdoté* (Paris: P. Jannet, 1854), p. 187. As mentioned earlier, the house in the *rue Childebert* was occupied by successive generations of Romantic artists. See note 50, above.

D'Anglemont continues with a description of the differences between the two characters, expressed through their clothing. The *bousingo* dressed himself with the accoutrements of revolutionary symbolism: 'le gilet à la Marat et les cheveux à la Robespierre'.[64] The *jeunes-France* preferred dress of an anachronistic and exotic literary style: the medievalism of Walter Scott, orientalism and generally anything serving as a metaphor for Romantic literary aesthetics.

Other descriptions of the *bousingo* abound in the press and in pamphlets of the epoch, yet none are so careful as de la Hodde and d'Anglemont in differentiating literary and political *bousingos*. In *La Caricature* of 21 July, 1831, we have the portrait of 'Un Conspirateur moderne':[65] a politically active young man who subscribes to the latest fashions, wearing 'redingote' and 'gilet ridicule', and who demands the abolition of capital punishment. The 'gilet ridicule' can be traced back to Gautier's audacious red vest for the premier of *Hernani*, which quickly became the fashion among young literary rebels and political insurgents alike.[66] In addition, the opposition to capital punishment follows the *jeune-France* creed as set out by Plagniol, and finds its literary origin in Hugo's *Le Dernier jour d'un condamné*, in Sand and in Stendhal. The article in *La Caricature* again underlines the fact that very specific political, sartorial and literary tendencies came together in one popular caricature.

The Goncourt brothers provide another interesting example of the importance of the dress code, and its political implications in the years following *Hernani*:

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[64]Ibid.

[65]*La Caricature*, vol. II, 38, 21 July, 1831, p. 298. The immense popularity of *La Caricature* is undisputed. In this journal in 1831 first appeared the now famous sketch of Louis-Philippe as a pear, which quickly became a universal caricature.

[66]Further evidence connecting the origins of the *jeune-France* style of costume with Gautier and the 'Petit cénacle' can be found in Villemessant, H. de, *Mémoires d'un journaliste* (Paris: E. Dentu, 1867), pp. 68-9. He devotes a short description to the costume of the *jeune-France* character that he played in a provincial play. The piece was comical, and the *jeune-France* figure meant to be a caricature. Villemessant mentions Gautier as the inspiration for some of the costume, particularly the hairstyle and waistcoat.

> A propos du livre: *Victor Hugo, raconté par un témoin de sa vie*, Gautier déclare que ce n'était pas un gilet rouge qu'il portait à *Hernani*, mais un pourpoint rose. Et sur le rire de la table, il ajoute: 'Mais c'est très important. Le gilet rouge aurait indiqué une nuance politique républicaine, et il n'y avait rien de ça. Nous étions seulement *moyenageux*...Et tous, Hugo comme nous. Un républicain, on ne savait pas ce que c'était...Il n'y avait que Pétrus Borel de républicain...'[67]

Red was the colour of Republican sympathisers, as evidenced in Napoléon Thom's portrait of Borel for the 1833 Salon: 'Gilet rouge, habit aux larges revers pointus, gants sang-royaliste, chapeau pointu, barbe et cheveux flottants.'[68] The portrait's tri-colored frame caused quite a stir. The political symbolism evinced a powerful public reaction.

In addition, there were inflammatory pamphlets decrying the criminal activities of the *bousingo*. *Les Bousingots, épitre à M. Viennet*, written by one F.L. Groult de Tourlaville, is a long poem that describes a horrific killing spree by an imaginary *bousingo* in the name of liberty and anarchy.[69] *Le Bousingot ou détails curieux et instructifs sur le nommé Antoine-Marie Raphaël Guilbert, rédacteur en chef du journal républicain, Le Patriote franc-comtois* is a tract apparently aimed at parents, detailing the downward criminal spiral of a young man who becomes involved in politics, and, even worse according to the author, political journalism.[70] A long list of crimes, prison terms and misadventures, the work appears designed to inhibit provincial families from allowing their children to finish their studies in the capital.

Thus, characters of both the *jeune-France* and the *bousingo* came to dominate a considerable amount of discussion of art and its relation to politics in the press. Between 1830 and 1832, tremendous attention was paid to these two artistic and political categories not only in *Le Figaro* and *L'Artiste*, but in numerous other journals and books.

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[67] de Goncourt, E. and J., *Journal, mémoires de la vie littéraire* (Paris: Fasquelle and Flammarion, 1956-9), vol. II, p. 107.

[68] Jal, M. *Salon de 1833. Les causeries du Louvre* (Paris: Gosselin, 1833).

[69] Groult de Tourlaville, F. L., *Les Bousingots, épitre à M. Viennet* (Paris: Delaunay, 1833)

[70] Anon., *Le Bousingot ou détails curieux et instructis sur le nommé Antoine-Marie Raphaël Guilbert, rédacteur en chef du journal républicain, Le Patriote franc-comtois* (Paris: Tillard, 1833).

Concurrently, there was much debate in artistic journals concerning the political responsibility of the artist, and the role of the artist in society generally. Much of this debate was brought about by political turmoil. Among the Romantics of Borel's group, however, political motivation played a smaller role in determining their engagement with debates on art than did the popular misconception of their artistic identities. While many artists debated the utility of art, other perhaps more fundamental and important questions were raised among the 'Petit cénacle' concerning the often problematic relationship of the artist to his public, and the effect that this relationship exercises on the possibility of the artist fulfilling a political role, or any role outside the realm of art.

The *jeune-France* and the *bousingo* quickly became caricatures of widespread popularity, in which the artists themselves, originators of the identity, saw little reflection of themselves. The erroneous caricatures, so popular in the press, led the artists of the 'Petit cénacle' to an acute awareness of the dangers of misinterpretation. A dynamic and tense relationship developed between the artist and the reading public that complicated the current discussion of the synthesis of artistic and political ideas. Threatened by a hostile and uncomprehending public, and yet driven by political and literary idealism, young artists focused on the conditions of public reception of their works, which announced an investigation of some of the fundamental problems of art's relation to other facets of culture. They were forced to ask whether or not the artist could advocate political ideas or in any other sense play an active or direct role in political or cultural change when his identity and subsequently his intentions were repeatedly and clumsily misinterpreted in the popular press. The minor Romantics were caught in a paradoxical relationship with their reading public and with the journalistic, critical establishment: they relied on these two bodies for the development of their literary celebrity, and yet the reception of their work, and the portrayal of their literary identities were often hostile. The consciousness of the problems of misinterpretation led the members of the 'Petit

cénacle' to focus upon a means of reconciling their need of the public with a sense of artistic integrity.

Discussion of the conditions of an artist's engagement with other cultural phenomena was the focus of much literary debate between 1830 and 1833, but by 1834 had diminished considerably. As we shall see in later chapters, although discussion of the utility of art, or of the necessary autonomy of the artist continued under the auspices of 'Art for Art's Sake', an examination of the paradoxical relationship between artist and public, and the particular irony that it elicited in the works of the minor Romantics faded quickly, only to re-surface nearly a generation later.

The Role of the Artist after the July Revolution: Debate in *L'Artiste* and Elsewhere

The reactions expressed by Borel through his art to the dynamic political and journalistic climate are one of the primary concerns of this thesis; but first it is necessary to examine and understand some of the debates on reception and interpretation of art among the artists of Borel's group and in the literary publications of the epoch, primarily in Arsène Houssaye's *L'Artiste*, a widely read and influential artistic journal to which Borel and his followers were regular contributors. The pressure exerted upon the artistic and journalistic world by the tumultuous political scene and the increasing influence of the press rapidly transformed the working conditions of the artist. Balzac's *Illusions perdues* and *La Fille d'Eve* portray the conditions of this transformation with relation to journalism. Although the story of *Illusions perdues* takes place nearly a decade prior to the activity of the 'Petit cénacle', occasional references to Borel's circle and to the

conditions of the journalistic and literary world in the early 1830s may be found.[71] The economics and politics of journalism as depicted in Balzac exercised at least as tyrannical an effect upon the artist of 1830, probably more, and this was perhaps an impetus for the creation of his novel between 1835 and 1843. In her study on *La Revue des deux mondes et le Romantisme*[72], Nelly Furman points out the rapidly growing influence of literary criticism in the wake of 1830. *La Revue des deux mondes* was created in 1830, one year after the battle of *Hernani*:

> La critique, qui sera appelée à prendre un si large développement sous la monarchie de Juillet, ne joua pour ainsi dire aucun rôle lors de la création de la *Revue*. Reléguée dans la rubrique 'Album' ou 'Variétés', elle n'apparaît tout d'abord que sous la forme de brèves notices anonymes [...] La critique acquiert [dans le quatrième volume de la *Revue*] ses lettres de noblesse, et connaît dès lors à la *Revue* une considération égale au respect dont jouissait déjà la littérature d'imagination.[73]

Furman speaks both of the situation in *La Revue*, and more generally of the role of criticism in the artistic press. Social commentary and artistic and cultural criticism increased dramatically in importance after 1830. The growth of journalism allowed critics a much more powerful forum than had been previously available. And the existence of so many political and literary melées drew the artists to respond both to the political questions that were raised, and to criticism of their work that often took on political tones.

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[71]Balzac in his description of the exotic fauna of the literary cafés mentions 'Le ventriloque Fitz-James [qui] a fleuri là dans le café Borel avant d'aller mourir à Montmartre [...]' (Balzac, Honoré de, *Illusions perdues* (Paris: Flammarion, 1990), p. 278). Fitz-Whyte and Fitz-Harris were the protagonists of Borel's novel *Madame Putiphar*, and the reference to dying on Montmartre quite likely refers to Borel's alter ego, the poet Champavert, pretended author of the eponymous collection who, in the final story, commits suicide on the slope of Montmartre. Other details abound. The popularity of the restaurant 'Chez Flicoteaux' among the artists in Balzac's work apparently continued through the 1830s. The actual restaurant is referred to on occasion in artistic journals of the first three years of 1830 in the same context that it is used in *Illusions perdues*, as a meeting place for struggling artists. Balzac also borrowed the sonnets figuring in the second half of the novel from Lassailly, Gautier and Madame de Girardin, being work of the early 1830s, and not of the previous decade (*Illusions perdues*, pp. 259-262).

[72] Furman, Nelly, *La Revue des deux mondes et le Romantisme* (Geneva: Droz, 1975).

[73] Furman, Nelly, op. cit., p. 39.

In addition, the key battles of Romanticism were seen, by the major participants, as having been won. From 1831, the criticism of Sainte-Beuve, Gustave Planche, and other critics who had fought for Romantic innovation, took on a tone that was less polemical and more disinterestedly analytical with regard to Romantic art. In the wake of their victory, the focus of critics also turned to the survival and development of the new school. Sainte-Beuve remarked on the multiform task of the critic in the wake of *Hernani*, in an article on Hugo's *Les Feuilles d'automne*:

> Il reste encore à la critique après le triomphe incontesté, universel, du génie auquel elle s'est vouée de bonne heure, et dont elle voit s'échapper de ses mains le glorieux monopole, il lui reste une tâche estimable, un souci attentif et religieux; c'est d'embrasser toutes les parties de ce poétique développement, d'en marquer la liaison avec les phrases qui précèdent, de remettre dans un vrai jour l'ensemble de l'œuvre progressive [...][74]

The opposition between Romantic conservatism and liberalism, between the *Globe* and the *Journal des Débats* or the *Conservateur*, was no longer so clearly defined. Sainte-Beuve invited the critic and artist to re-situate Romantic art. The call was taken up enthusiastically in both an artistic and political context.

In an early letter to the *Artiste*, Achille Devéria, inhabitant of the rue Childebert, occasional participant in the 'Petit cénacle' and celebrated painter and illustrator of many Romantic works, notably those of Borel and Hugo, points out the unique, precarious situation of the artist, more than ever before dependent upon the support of a journalistic, critical establishment, and a public whose concerns often run counter to his own .[75] With journalistic criticism in mind, he points out the frivolity or the insouciance with which contemporary journalists judge works. Of equal importance is the public's tolerance of mean-spirited or frivolous criticism:

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[74] Sainte-Beuve, '*Les Feuilles d'automne* de M. Victor Hugo', *Revue des deux mondes*, vol. IV, 15 December, 1831, pp. 649-50, cited in Furman, op. cit., p. 49.

[75] *L'Artiste*, vol. I, 8, p. 97.

> Le public n'est que trop porté à recueillir avec avidité les traits mordans qui peuvent amener des résultats si fâcheux pour l'existence actuelle et la carrière à venir des artistes qui, ne suivant pas la voie commune, ne peuvent réellement modifier leur essor naturel que par une condition dont leur expérience, en définitive, reste seule juge.[76]

Devéria illustrates the artist's newly acute awareness both of the professional concern of the journalist, and of the preconditioning role that critical reviews play upon the reading public. He points to the relationship between the artist, the public and his critics in the sense of a dynamic: the critic responding to the works, and in turn his critique affecting the faculty that produces subsequent works. In this context, one can easily imagine the improvised articles of Lucien de Rubempré or Raoul Nathan, following a set critical formula, not having read the works under criticism themselves.

> Le journaliste devient quelque chose comme le Raoul Nathan de Balzac, l'homme de lettres à tout faire, vaudevilliste, dramaturge, critique, journaliste politique, à l'occasion homme d'affaires, d'une activité immense et brouillonne, d'ailleurs sans instruction ni style, le contraire d'un artiste, n'ayant ni le temps, ni le goût, ni la patience d'écrire, l'homme de son temps, un de ces 'jeunes ambitieux de la littérature' que Balzac nous montre en train d'envahir les lettres.[77]

The professional critic is a relatively new and often hostile phenomenon with which the creative artist must contend.

Devéria logically concludes that one must understand the subtle, easily agitated temperament of the artist properly to judge his work, but more importantly, in order to gain an awareness of the negative effect that frivolous criticism exercises on art, and thus to increase the sagacity of criticism. One should also note that Devéria is keen to point out that an artist's inspiration comes from experience of which he is the sole judge. This

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[76]Ibid.

[77]Cassagne, Albert, *La théorie de l'art pour l'art en France* (Genève: Slatkine Reprints, 1979), p. 20.

runs contrary to the more commonly recognised, Romantic paradigm of art criticism, according to which the artist's biography is a reliable exegetical tool.

Borel is as aware as Devéria of the precarious position that new artists find themselves in when trying to make a career in the early 1830s. Criticism can have a pernicious effect on the creative capacity and on the fortunes of a young artist. Borel characterises the indignity of the artist whose livelihood is threatened and who feels the very core of his artistic identity to be under attack:

> Nous apprendrons au public étonné tout ce qu'ont fait souffrir d'humiliant et d'infâme à des jeunes gens qu'on s'efforce d'écraser et d'abrutir par la misère, la faim, le découragement, la stupidité des programmes, les sourdes intrigues, les ignobles manœuvres, parce que leur âme d'artiste est plus chaude que celle de leurs maîtres, parce que leurs ailes ont les plumes plus fortes et plus longues.[78]

Borel's description of the artist under attack applies both to the academic critical establishment (the traditional target of Romantic polemics), and to the growing professional, critical establishment. It is interesting to note that Borel appeals to a public that was quick to welcome the 'traits mordans' of superficial criticism. His sense of persecution and his fierce desire to provoke his audience are often at odds. In his later, creative work, these combative impulses have remarkable side effects.

The artists of Borel's circle were all aware of the propensity of this relatively new critical establishment for misinterpretation; this was aggravated by the perceived hostility of conservative academic bodies. The minor Romantic felt himself to be under attack from all sides. From this sense of persecution comes a variation on the Romantic approach to criticism that one finds typified in the work of Sainte-Beuve. For Sainte-Beuve, the moral character of the artist, his habits, his diet, all of these things are food for the critic; with a knowledge of the man, Sainte-Beuve assumes that one can reconstruct a fuller meaning from the work of art. Conversely, for the artists and critics who were

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[78] *La Liberté, journal des arts*, p. 22.

concerned with Borel's circle, a knowledge of the personal traits of an author are necessary to criticism *not* as an exegetical key, but so that critics can avoid inhibiting future creation. The *jeunes-France* demanded critical understanding and sensitivity. They hoped to re-define the moral obligations of the critic regarding the artist under his scrutiny.

This point of view is echoed by another sometime member of the 'Petit cénacle', Alfred Johannot, in an article from the following issue of *L'Artiste* entitled 'Du point de vue dans la critique',[79] and which is again taken up in an anonymous article entitled 'De la critique spirituelle et de la critique spéciale'.[80] The relationship between artist and critic is re-defined. The burden of responsibility is placed upon the critic to maintain an environment in which the production of art of quality is not inhibited for the sake of a journalist's professionalism or economy. Most interesting in this context is the fashion through which the changing economics of the literary profession, and the growth of journalism, affect the moral relationships between artist and critic. The critic is called upon by artists to alter his perspective.

Biography is, in fact, understood by the minor Romantics, and by many of the critics who discussed their work, as an unreliable point of reference when ascertaining the meaning of a work. The suspicion the *jeune-France* Romantic held for his audience, and his subsequent duplicity, led him to distort any personal revelations. And we shall see that critics who treated the charnel-house school of the 1830s, and authors like Borel and Lassailly, were more aware than most of the unreliability of biography in understanding art, or for that matter the man behind it. The awareness of the ways in which artistic identity was easily distorted in the press, and the subsequent dubiousness of biographical criteria in criticism, stemmed directly from an acute awareness of the

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[79]*L'Artiste*, vol. I, 9, p. 109.

[80]Ibid, vol. II, 15, p. 162.

intense pressures that journalism exercised on art. The duplicity of the artist's aesthetic experience is emphasized in a later article by Saint-Chéron, popular artistic critic of the period and church historian.[81] In 'Philosophie de l'art, la vie poétique et la vie privée', he distinguishes the duality of the artist in terms of critical interpretation. Like Proust in *Contre Sainte-Beuve*, Saint-Chéron emphasizes the risks of attempting to understand the creative inspiration of an artist through his day-to-day persona:

> L'homme et l'artiste sont aujourd'hui deux êtres dans le même être profondément séparés [...].
>
> L'homme de la vie privée, l'homme de la famille, l'homme qui s'est réjoui de la naissance d'un premier-né, qui a pleuré la perte d'êtres bien-aimés [...] n'a rien de commun avec l'homme de la vie poétique, avec l'artiste créateur de poèmes, romans, drames, peintures ou sculptures de notre époque.[82]

Saint-Chéron refers to the duality of the artist in the context of contemporary art, and points out that this is not a condition of artists in previous epochs. Saint-Chéron's diagnosis of the artistic schizophrenia that is epidemic in the 1830s refers directly to the artists of the *jeune-France* group, and to the proponents of the *roman charogne*:

> Alors, qu'est-ce donc que leur art? un art de caprice et de fantaisie qui affecte de ne suivre aucunes règles, de ne représenter aucune pensée grave, aucune émotion élevée, qui affecte de dérouter le public sur l'intention et le but de l'œuvre; un art de cauchemars, de débauches, d'orgies, d'assassinats [...].[83]

Saint-Chéron's observations about the tendencies of contemporary artists with regard to the reading public (for example, the artist's tendency to hide intention and to 'dérouter le public'), are important indications of a new consciousness among artists, and particularly those of the 'Petit cénacle'. The artist's duplicity and elusiveness are indicative of his

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[81]Saint-Chéron was a regular contributor to the *Artiste*, author and editor of a history of the papacy, *Histoire de la papauté* (Paris: Sagnier et Bray, 1848), and author of a popular collection of his own art criticism, *De la poésie et des beaux arts dans notre époque* (Paris: Sagnier et Bray, 1833), among numerous other works.

[82]*L'Artiste*, vol. IV, 24, p. 269.

[83]Ibid., p. 270.

anxiety regarding the public and the critics. The pressures of the relatively new nature of journalistic criticism helped push the artist to adopt a highly ironised mode of representation as a means of distancing himself when treating his literary subjects, and particularly when he was engaging in autobiography and self-confession, staples of Romantic art. Thus, Borel's *Champavert* and *Rhapsodies* are exemplary of the new irony that was employed in an effort simultaneously to engage the reader, and to shock and disillusion him, while hiding the author's relation to his apparently autobiographical text.

Concern with representation and misinterpretation logically accompanies much of the discussion of criticism in *L'Artiste*. In an early issue, a quarrel breaks out between Paganini, who was performing in Paris in 1831, and Boulanger, who had represented Paganini in a series of fantastic short stories in the style of Hoffman.[84] Paganini was angry with the way that his work was fancifully interpreted by Parisian journalists, and with the way in which he was made the subject of short fiction. The quarrel continued for several issues, and involved discussion of musical interpretation, interpretation of art in general, and the freedom of the critic to act as artist and embellish the interpretation of a work with his own fictions and 'traits d'esprit'. In fact, Paganini and Beethoven became a focus for questions of interpretation by literary artists of the generation of 1830 in much the same way that the music of Wagner became a focus for members of the Symbolist generation: the 'abstraction' of music, and its evocative emotional qualities were a condition that artists such as Borel attempted to reach in their prose. Borel, in a polemical article published in *L'Artiste* of 1833, sees music as the final refuge of free,

[84]Ibid., vol. I, 13, p. 116. Paganini was also the subject of a fantastic story by Alphonse Brot, another member of Borel's group. The story 'Les deux notes' was published in *L'Artiste*, vol. I, 9, p. 116. Among Borel's group, Alphonse Brot appeared to publish the greatest number of short stories and articles in the *Artiste* and in other periodicals of the time. He was apparently a rising figure in the literary world, but his eclipse appears even swifter than that of Borel. Much of his short fiction concerns mystical experiences in the lives of famous artists. He writes fictional accounts of Michelangelo and Dante, involving the artists in supernatural experiences, and tying these to their creative genius.

artistic expression. His sense of persecution leads him to paint a grim view of the situation of art and of visual and literary artists in the early nineteenth century:

> Après une longue bataille, un douloureux travail pour jeter fleurs, feuilles et fruits, nos hautes intelligences, nos haut cœurs, nos grandes ames [sic], épuisés, s'écoulent en désirs, et fluent en pleurs amers, en larmes de sang.[85]

Poets and painters have been abused by the critical establishments such that music is the only art form that still flourishes:

> Si quelque pierrerie doit briller encore au doigt décharné et compteur du dix-neuvième siècle, sûrement c'est le diamant de la musique.
> [...]
> Oui, l'avenir est tout entier à la musique et son règne est commencé.[86]

Much discussion revolved around the abstract and evocative qualities of various artistic forms. The importance of the ideistic and imagistic content of art was not nearly as much debated as the importance of form, which, in the minds of contemporary artists and critics, exercised a more reliable and direct evocative effect upon the consumer of art. In an article concerning public censure of Janin's *Barnave*, Frédéric Soulié comments on the misguided focus of critics upon the political content of the work. For Soulié, content is the most easily misjudged aspect of a work of art. *Barnave*'s gruesome scenes are not important for Soulié in the reality that they depict. According to him, they escape analysis, in much the same way as other fantastic or *roman charogne* works. On the contrary, the work's importance lies in that disconcerting effect, that is dependent upon the fashion of its rendering:

> Je considère le tableau et le marbre sans m'inquiéter qu'ils représentent Trajan, Néron, Napoléon ou M. Viennet. C'est le pinceau que je viens étudier, c'est le ciseau que j'admire; c'est le style, c'est l'exécution de *Barnave* qui me semblent prodigieux.[87]

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[85]Ibid. vol. V, 16, p. 32.

[86]Ibid.

[87]Ibid., 8, p. 88.

The beginnings of 'Art for Art's Sake', its formal considerations and its call for the autonomy of art can be clearly detected in these early debates. Yet one must always keep in mind the complexity of these discussions. It was not the case that simple disillusion with politics and with artistic 'engagement' caused artists like Gautier later to concentrate on form and prosodic technique. The issues at stake were varied, and the reactions of artists, even more so.

Within Borel's circle, the pressures of criticism and of public reception, particularly the distortion that arose from the common assumption that the artists' mode of dress and behaviour concealed a political agenda, engendered the sort of reaction that one finds in the preface to Gautier's *Les Jeunes France, romans goguenards* or *Mademoiselle de Maupin*: a disengagement from politics in the first instance, and from accountability to any non-artistic considerations in the second. For Borel, disengagement was less easy. An awareness of the problems of reception and interpretation by the public and by a growing critical establishment exercised a more profound and complex effect on Borel's work; in his journalistic criticism as well as his fiction, a consciousness of these problems is ever present.

In an article entitled 'Des artistes penseurs et des artistes creux'[88], Borel discusses the interpretive act as foremost in the artist's mind when creating a work. For Borel, art is translation of thought, which, when interpreted by the reader, will necessarily be inexactly rendered:

> La pensée a divers moyens de traduction, divers moyens d'épanchement, d'effusion et de communication; elle peut se traduire par la voix, les signes, l'écriture, la peinture, la sculpture, la musique, etc., etc. Toutes ces traductions, il est vrai, ne sont pas également fidèles, littérales, positives; mais ce sont biens toutes des traductions.[89]

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[88]Ibid., 21, p. 213

[89]Ibid., 21, p. 253.

Borel's line of reasoning naturally leads him to contemplate the influence upon artistic interpretation of various forms. Because the medium is unreliable in translating an artist's intention or the 'rationality' of his thoughts, the emotional effect of the work must be foremost. As Saint-Chéron mentioned in his complaint concerning the new school, art must disturb and shock, but cannot properly serve to convey 'pure' ideas. With this in mind, Borel emphasizes imagination as the most important of creative faculties (a thought that Baudelaire would later echo[90]), and states that only through imagination is one able to arrive at a powerfully evocative art:

> Et voici, autant que je puis l'exprimer ce que je comprends par l'imagination : la faculté donnée à certaines intelligences, en se repliant sur elle-mêmes, de concevoir, de combiner, d'enfanter des compositions neuves, étranges, qui étonnent, qui saisissent, qui émeuvent par leur hardiesse, leur originalité inouïe; sans but rationnel, mais grandiose; sans révélations, mais jetant dans le transport; sans consolations, sans espoirs, mais étourdissantes[...][91]

Borel places emphasis on the response of the reader; literature is designed to surprise, to seize the reader, and one would infer from his works, to throw the reader off-balance. As we shall see, there is an inherent irony in this position that is strongly expressed in Borel's creative fiction. He knew that as an artist he was dependent upon his reading public, but was simultaneously scornful of their ignorance and aware of the unreliability of his artistic medium in conveying ideas. More than the other members of the 'Petit Cénacle', Borel was preoccupied with this paradox of artistic interpretation. Unlike Gautier, he was concerned with the effect that art exercised on the public apart from aesthetic considerations. Toward the end of his article, he states that renovation in art

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[90]C'est l'imagination qui a enseigné à l'homme le sens moral de la couleur, du contour, du son et du parfum. Elle a créé, au commencement du monde, l'analogie et la métaphore [...]. Comme l'imagination a crée le monde, elle la gouverne.' Baudelaire, Charles, 'Salon de 1859' in *OC*, vol. II, p. 621.

[91]*L'Artiste*, vol. V, 21, p. 255.

and aesthetics must take a moral direction (and again one thinks of Baudelaire)[92], but he is careful to distance himself from 'utilitarians', knowing that any direct or concerted didacticism in art is subject to misinterpretation or rejection by the reading public. 'Mais, je prie aussi en grâce de ne point me confondre avec les *utilitaires*. J'ai demandé de la pensée et de l'imagination dans l'art, et non de l'utilité.'[93]

Many of the political metaphors employed by the artists of the 'Petit cénacle', both in their work and in critical articles, refer directly to this problematic relationship between artist, critic and public, and outline a desire to raise consciousness concerning the artist's particular difficulties. Political metaphor is used frequently in defining the struggle of the artist for recognition and for a role in society less constrained by the pressures of journalism and by the conservatism of the Academy. Utilitarianism in art is rarely if ever discussed by the artists of the 'Petit cénacle', nor do they define a concrete role for artists with respect to other facets of culture, namely politics. Nevertheless, one does encounter frequent discussion of the pressures exerted upon the artist by politics and journalism. In this context, there is an effort to define a situation in which the artist may create in perfect liberty. The artists in Borel's group were 'political' only through their efforts to distance themselves from political questions, or to re-define the artist's role in such a way that political pressure on the artist was less direct.

Nevertheless, Asselineau's claim that Borel represents the invasion of politics in the realm of literature is not entirely incorrect, for political militancy certainly influenced the style of debate of members of the 'Petit cénacle' when championing the aesthetic reforms of Romanticism, or demanding freedom from the critical pressures of a rapidly expanding and professionally interested journalistic establishment. But the 'Petit cénacle' had little to do with the true *bousingo* or with the abundant political rioters.

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[92]One should consider Baudelaire's provocation of his reader from the very outset of *Les Fleurs du Mal*. 'Au Lecteur' defines an innovative moral relationship between reader and author.

[93]Ibid., vol. V. 21, p. 259.

In 1832, Borel along with Jehan Duseigneur founded a short-lived artistic review entitled *La Liberté, journal des arts*, whose goal was to fight against public ignorance, aesthetic conservatism and the professional tyranny of criticism. Borel describes the aims of the journal in the first article of the first edition bearing the subtitle 'La liberté est bonne à tous'.[94] Here, the political metaphors are abundant. Borel voices the disappointment of the July Revolution, and describes the uprising as an aborted attempt to gain artistic as well as political liberty. He likens his artistic polemicizing to a continuation of the assault of the revolutionaries two years previous, and demands the freedom of the artist to create his work without the constraints of criticism that is too far removed from the concerns of the artist himself. His description of an army of young artists assaulting the fortresses of aesthetic conservatism is filled with military metaphors of bloody political insurrection, so fresh in popular memory:

> Un prospectus annonça, il y a quelques tems, que des hommes dévoués, des artistes d'âme, à la gêne sous un régime bâtard, étranglés par l'Institut et les écoles, s'étaient groupés en faisceaux pour conquérir à leurs frères la liberté qu'ils s'étaient déjà faite à eux-mêmes, à leurs risques et périls. Ce manifeste, car c'est une vraie guerre que nous engageons, et une guerre à mort, faisait appel à tous les artistes, architectes, sculpteurs, graveurs, peintres, musiciens et poètes: or, cette voix qui parlait alors a été entendue; des échos nous ont répondus de tous côtés, car ce qui est généreux retentit en France; partout, des écoles, des ateliers, des cabinets, des portes de l'Institut, et presque de son sein, sont accourus en foule, serrés, graves, hardis, pleins de courage, des hommes demandant la direction à suivre, la voie à parcourir, les ordres à exécuter: la graine a rayonné en gerbe, le noyau s'est épanoui en arbre, et les individus ont fait peuple: l'armée est prête, les cadres remplis, les soldats exercés, et le mot d'ordre, qui n'avait encore été que bégayé, que prononcé tout bas, nous le crions aujourd'hui à voix haute: *Mort à l'Institut! mort au professoriat!*[95]

Ironically, the major critics of the Romantic movement see the war as over. But Borel is perhaps correct in estimating that the second generation, the minor Romantics of the 'Petit cénacle', are the foot soldiers in a battle, although it has certainly changed shape since 1829. Borel decries the lack of concern of the Academy, the Institute, and of the

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[94] *La Liberté, journal des arts*, vol. I, 1, (1832), p. 12.

[95] Ibid., pp. 12-13.

critical establishment about issues that are crucial to the new generation of creative artists. His fight is no longer simply a battle of aesthetic principles, but also of the professional concerns of a new generation of artists:

> C'est du pain, c'est de la réputation que nous demandons, et nous n'en voulons pas miette à miette, comme on consentirait peut-être à nous l'accorder; mais à tous, à la vie entière, à tous libre et sans entraves, le champ du combat où se dispute la gloire.[96]

His calls for liberty are echoed throughout the journal, in articles that demand that the institutions that accredit artists, or that mete out recognition, be submitted to control by artists themselves, and not by journalists, professors and members of the various academies whose aesthetic sense is that of a previous era, or whose concerns are largely professional.

Once one has an understanding of the dynamics of artistic creation and criticism during Borel's epoch, it grows quickly clear that Republicanism or other very clear political aims were separable from the actual agenda of the 'Petit cénacle'. *La Liberté* may at first appear a provocative political journal. But, as in the later work of Borel, political terms are employed almost wholly for their rhetorical value; as far as governmental politics are concerned, the editors express virtually no knowledge or interest.

Thus, although the members of the 'Petit cénacle' were associated loosely with republican ideas and with the student rioters or *bousingos*, they did not work toward political ends themselves, but instead adopted the powerful language and imagery of politics to further their artistic ends. In a widely cited avowal by Borel that many critics have employed as evidence of political engagement, one perceives - on the contrary - a

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[96]Ibid., p. 14.

distancing from political questions. In the preface to his collection *Rhapsodies*, Borel writes:

> [...]je suis républicain comme l'entendrait un loup-cervier : mon républicanisme, c'est de la lycanthropie!– Si je parle de république, c'est parce que ce mot me représente la plus large indépendance que puisse laisser l'association et la civilisation. Je suis républicain parce que je ne puis pas être caraïbe [...][97]

Thus, Borel's call for political and artistic freedom explicitly entails an absence of true political discourse. And in an article from *La Liberté*, 'Aux artistes', Borel's call-to-arms anticipates anarchy, not political involvement, as the necessary precondition of artistic freedom:

> Nous voulons la liberté sans transactions, sans compromis, sans crainte des chances à venir, même de l'anarchie.
>
> Car l'anarchie dont on nous parle, n'est peut-être que l'inévitable prologue.[98]

Borel's preference for anarchy expresses a desire to do away with the pressures of politics completely in order to leave the artist absolute freedom of expression. Simultaneously, Borel's demand for anarchy and liberty, and his avowal of *lycanthropie*, must be understood as an ironic and self-parodic means of distancing himself from an engagement with a journalistic milieu that had already exaggerated the truculence of his literary persona. The famous epithet 'lycanthrope' appears to have originated with Borel, but was quickly adopted and developed by literary critics much in the same way that the personae of the *jeune-France* and the *bousingo* were distorted and propagated. The ambiguity of Borel's position was not appreciated by the critics of the period, who saw only nascent lunacy and republican conspiracy: 'des injures, de l'argot, des jurons, des blasphèmes et des cigares', the work of 'un franc républicain'[99] . One could call Borel

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[97]Borel, Pétrus, *Rhapsodies*, p. 13.

[98] *La Liberté*, vol. I, 1, (1832), p. 27.

[99]*Le Mercure*, XXXVI, 25 February, 1832, p. 307.

anything but 'franc', and the duplicity of his literary identity, the lycanthrope or man-wolf, reveals his ambivalence. The article concerning Borel's commune in the *Figaro* is one among many instances where Borel's 'lycanthropy' is selected as a distinguishing feature, taking precedence over literary merit because of its novelty and audacity.[100]

In the preface to his work *Champavert*, Borel reacts to this growth of the myth of his 'lycanthropy' beyond his intentions. His solution is to do away with the literary persona that no longer reflects the image that he had hoped to project. He pretends that Pétrus Borel was simply a pseudonym for a troubled young man named 'Champavert', who committed suicide shortly before the publishing of the work. He thus distances himself from an identity that he felt he could no longer control. The same process of distancing is at work in Gautier's *Les Jeunes-France, romans goguenards*. Gautier employs the exaggerated portrait of the literary identity of his youth ostensibly to inform the public about the habits of the celebrated *jeune-France* Romantic, and yet furnishes a caricature that serves primarily to aggravate public misconception. Gautier's portrait is more ridiculous than that of the *Figaro*, and one can only imagine that it was with the intention of re-appropriating the literary caricature of the *jeune-France* while simultaneously distancing himself from his own involvement in the more outrageous activities of the 'Petit cénacle', that Gautier exceeded the *Figaro* in humorous exaggeration. In both the cases of *Champavert* and *Les Jeunes-France*, Gautier and Borel respond to public misconception by further developing a portrait of which they had lost partial control. In Gautier's case, accentuating the eccentricity of the *jeune-France* beyond that of previous caricatures, and in Borel's case, developing the truculence of his

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[100]Most reviews of the period concentrate upon Borel's truculence, his apparent political conviction, and adopt the term 'lycanthrope' as a convenient means of summing up his persona, and at the same time using the epithet as a term of ridicule. See Reynaud, J., 'Rhapsodies', *Revue encyclopédique*, 52, 1831, pp. 427-31; Lacroix, Paul, 'Champavert, contes immoraux', *Revue de Paris*, vol. I, 48, 1833, pp. 144-6; Laviron, Gabriel, 'Champavert, contes immoraux', *L'Artiste*, vol. V, 4, 1833, p. 67-68, in addition to Cons, Louis, 'Pétrus Borel: pourquoi "le Lycanthrope"?', *The Romanic Review*, vol. XXIII, 4, (1932), pp. 321-3

alter-ego and then creating his demise, ensure that the creative artist has the last word over both critics and public.

Remarkably, feverish debate in artistic journals on the role of the artist in society appears with considerably less frequency after 1834. Certainly, from this date, a change of attitude concerning the egotism of Romantic literature begins to permeate criticism. Concerning poetry, Gustave Planche writes:

> La poésie lyrique a maintenant épuisé l'étude de la vie individuelle[...] l'égoïsme poétique excite de jour en jour des sympathies moins vives.[101]

Not only is there less interest in the agonising introspection of Romantic lyricism, but there is subsequently less critical speculation on the role of the individual artist. Not surprisingly, mention of the *bousingo* and of the *jeune-France* is not made again. From being a caricature mentioned almost daily, the young Romantic conspirator disappears entirely from the popular press. In addition, and not unconnectedly, political insurrection is quelled definitively, both in Paris and Lyon. In 1831, the *bousingo* and republican uprisings near Saint-Merri and in Saint-Germain l'Auxerrois are mirrored by a much more violent rebellion in Lyon.[102] In 1834, the final insurrections of these tumultuous years are savagely repressed. The Lyon insurrection of 1834 is small compared to that of three years previously. The Paris rebellion of 1834 ends in the bloody massacre of the rue Transnonain. Not coincidentally, in the same year, public criers, and sellers of caricature and pamphlets on the street are forbidden by law to ply their trade without government license.[103] It is the end of the *bousingo*.

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[101] Planche, Gustave, 'Les Royautés littéraires', *La Revue des deux mondes*, vol. I, 1 March 1834, pp. 534-5, cited in Furman, Nelly, op. cit., p. 70.

[102] Borel's solidarity with his Lyonnais brethren is expressed in both *Rhapsodies* and *Champavert*, as I demonstrate in the following chapters. His show of support comes doubtless in the wake of the vicious government crack-down on political demonstration of any kind.

[103] Séguin, Jean-Pierre, *Nouvelles à sensation, canards du XIXe siècle*, p 95.

The Beginnings of Borel's 'Romantic Irony'

The erroneous association that the public and newspaper press made between the student rioters and the members of the 'Petit cénacle' had numerous effects, none of which see the further political engagement of Borel's literary group. One primary effect is to cause the group to distance themselves from political debate through satire, both of themselves and of public ignorance. At the same time, because of their scorn for the bourgeoisie, the members of the 'Petit cénacle' are not overly concerned with enlightening the members of the middle class as to their true position; thus, one encounters the occasional display of bizarre political posturing, as in the case of Borel's avowal of political 'lycanthropy', that serves at once as an ironic disavowal of politics, and as an affront to the contemporary political *status quo*.

For some of the artists, clear retreat from political debate and from accountability to the public was the principal reaction; one sees quite plainly in the early work of Gautier that his tendency, in the wake of the *bousingo* debate, was to avoid political matters entirely. The preface to *Albertus* of 1832, which foreshadows the later call for the autonomy of art in *Mademoiselle de Maupin*, must be acknowledged, but more pertinent to the *bousingo* context is Gautier's summation of his political beliefs in the preface to *Les Jeunes-France, romans goguenards*. Gautier addresses himself directly to those who would attribute a political motivation to the conduct of him and his associates, as had been done in the literary press:

> Quant à mes opinions politiques, elle sont de la plus grande simplicité. Après de profondes réflexions sur le renversement des trônes, les changements de dynastie, je suis arrivé à ceci– 0.[104]

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[104]Gautier, Théophile, *Les Jeunes-Frances, romans goguenards*, p. xv.

For other artists, the erroneous attribution of political attitudes elicited an ironic, almost playful engagement with the public's misconceptions. While Gautier declines to participate, Borel incorporates the consciousness of problems of public reception and critical interpretation into his work, in a form of ironic subversion incompletely characterised by René Bourgeois.[105]

The example of the growth of the *jeune-France* and *bousingo* myth served as a personal example of the risks of misinterpretation, and yet concurrently was a caricature popular enough to gain considerable celebrity for Borel and his group. Thus, a difficult-to-resolve push-and-pull developed between the artists, and particularly Borel, and the reading public. As Charles Monselet stated in his *Lorgnette littéraire*[106], a compilation of literary portraits of the Romantic period, Borel came to represent a particularly outrageous facet of Romanticism that was defined by his primordial desire to mystify and mislead the public:

> Malgré d'excellentes et sérieuses qualités, M. Pétrus Borel, pour avoir voulu trop mystifier le public et la critique, a laissé un nom qui est le synonyme du romantisme le plus outré.[107]

His relationship with the journalistic, critical establishment was characterised by some animosity, but the expressions of his awareness of problems of reception, and particularly his irony, were appreciated by subsequent creative artists. The examination of the

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[105]Bourgeois, René, *L'ironie romantique* (Grenoble: Presses Universitaires de Grenoble, 1974), pp. 65-83. Bourgeois is careful to differentiate Romantic irony from the lighter, stylistic irony of the 18th century, and recognises in the work of Borel a desire for synthesis of paradoxical aims from which his ironic sense springs. It is the goal of this study to promote the tensions between reading public, journalistic critical establishment and artist as one of the primary sources of Borel's ironised position. Bourgeois analyses Borel's work in largely stylistic terms, neglecting the background crucial to an understanding of his position. Much of Borel's project is left unexamined.

[106]Monselet, Charles, *Lorgnette littéraire, ou dictionnaire des grands et des petits auteurs de mon temps* (Paris: Poulet-Malassis et de Broise, 1857). Significantly, Monselet's book includes portraits of Alphonse Brot, Philothée O'Neddy, Augustus MacKeat, Pétrus Borel, Jehan Duseigneur and other authors now considered of minor importance, and yet neglects to mention Gautier, Nerval or Balzac. The book may be taken as a gauge of the celebrity of these authors during the period.

[107]Monselet, op. cit., p. 26.

influence of the debates of the first years of the 1830s on Borel's creative work itself, and the difference between the reception of his work among critics and among creative artists, will form the subject of subsequent chapters.

Chapter 2

Literary Ethics, Irony and Pétrus Borel's *Rhapsodies*

The previous chapter has explored the complexities of the pressures that political unrest, the growth of journalism and other factors exercised upon each other and upon the literary world, and the problems and debates that such pressures engendered among the group of artists working around Borel and beginning their careers in the first years of the 1830s. The self-consciousness that artists such as Borel felt in responding to such pressures, aware of the ways in which they conditioned public and critical reception of an artist's work, was one of the first steps in the development of a particular form of irony which may serve as a revision and as an addition to some of the critical work concerning the subject of 'Romantic Irony'.[1] A dynamic and often antagonistic relationship quickly developed between Borel and contemporary critics and between Borel and his reading public.

Borel wrote his fiction with the potential for its distortion well in his mind, and thus he certainly felt constrained by the fact that his identity, expressed in his writing, was itself subject to distortion. We have seen this occur in a general sense with the treatment in the literary and political press of the *jeune-France* and *bousingo* caricatures. During the period of political instability, the consequences of such misinterpretation were severe. Borel and his friends were frequently arrested for their unorthodox appearance

[1] In Appendix I of this thesis, I explore more fully the development of the concept of 'irony' in the nineteenth century, and recent criticism on 'Romantic Irony'.

and behaviour. Similar misinterpretation occurred in the case of Borel's authorial persona and alter-ego, the 'lycanthrope', which grew beyond his control and intention through caricature within the popular and literary press, although Borel was still drawn to account for the outrageousness of this persona. The development of the 'lycanthrope' myth elicited a self-protective irony in Borel and was one impetus for the literary pseudonymy employed in his collection *Champavert.*

In short, Borel's irony stemmed from problems of identity. He was identified as what he was not, and the antagonistic relationship that he shared or that he perceived himself to share with a large portion of his readership left him hesitant to correct any misconception. It was certainly convenient at times to enjoy the celebrity that even caricature or bad publicity carried. But how to reconcile this sort of celebrity with any sense of artistic integrity? Here some observations by Kierkegaard concerning the relationship of language, identity and irony are useful:

> Now, truth demands identity [...] When I am aware as I speak that what I am saying is what I mean and that what I say adequately expresses my meaning and I assume that the person to whom I speak grasps my meaning completely, then I am bound in what has been said–that is, I am positively free therein. Here, the old verse is appropriate: 'The word, once let slip, flies beyond recall'. I am also bound with respect to myself, and cannot free myself at any time I wish. If however, what I said is not my meaning or the opposite of my meaning, then I am free in relation to myself and to others.[2]

Communication and 'socratic irony' were indissociable for Kierkegaard. He argues that Socrates engaged young men whom he pursued as objects of desire in philosophical conversation. The young men found themselves engaged with Socrates, thus entering into a tacit contract. Their identities were bound in what they said, and were bound in that sense to Socrates via the norms of a friendship of virtue, where both parties ostensibly push each other to greater achievement or understanding. The young

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[2]Kierkegaard, Søren, *The Concept of Irony with Continual Reference to Socrates*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), p. 247.

men soon found that Socrates was not entirely 'present' in what he said. His manner of questioning relied on constant mobility, substituting answers with further questions. His irony as defined by Hegel, 'infinite absolute negativity', eluded 'closure' and the young men felt the stable ground of certainty dissolve beneath them. They found themselves pursuing the elusive Socrates for a certainty of which he had deprived them, and for the closure that eluded them. The desirer became the desired.

The concept of irony changed considerably in the first half of the nineteenth century.[3] Kierkegaard's doctoral thesis, *The Concept of Irony with Continual Reference to Socrates*, first published in 1841, played a significant role in defining the metaphysical properties of irony, and in capturing the substance of a discussion on irony that had been going on since the late eighteenth century. In France, irony had long been understood in terms of style and rhetoric. But in the early 1800s, irony appeared in the vocabulary of Romantic thinkers in Germany, and later in France, as a metaphysical condition. Irony went from being considered an element of rhetorical style to being considered as a mode of existence. It was a metaphysical concept that incorporated the paradoxes of Romantic thought. One of the most resonant and provocative characterisations of irony from the early nineteenth century comes from Friedrich Schlegel. For Schlegel, experience was complex to the extent that only an ambivalent or duplicitous perspective could capture some of its chaotic variety. Irony, for the younger Schlegel, then stems from, 'klares Bewusstsein der ewigen Agilität, des unendlich vollen Chaos'[4]. Irony is the clear awareness of the mobility and endless fullness of chaos. Borel applied a similar way of seeing to questions of literary identity.

Borel employs a nearly identical strategy to that of Socrates regarding a perceivedly hostile readership. Borel desired the reader's attention, but did not want to

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[3] See note 1, above.

[4] von Schlegel, Friedrich, Hans Eichner, ed., *Kritische Friedrich Schlegel Ausgabe* (Paderborn: Shöningh, 1967), p. 263.

reveal his ideas or identity fully to that reader. His desire to engage with the reader is balanced by resentment and suspicion; this was not the case with Socrates and his young men. Kierkegaard's model of irony and communication implies a circuit within which the meaning and identity of the speaker are conditionally contained. One could perhaps alter the conditions of this circuit of communication in reference to Borel and his literary contemporaries: they could not always assume that the person with whom they were speaking was capable of adequately grasping their message. In fact, the readership that they could rely on for adequate understanding was necessarily small: those artists who shared their concerns and beliefs. The identity of the *bousingo* was not understood by the public in the same manner that it was understood by the artists whose activities provided substance for the evolving caricature. For many artists, the circuit of communication needed to be changed or transcended. For Borel, the conditions of communication had broken down almost irreparably.

This idea of 'conditions' can imply an ethical standard regarding the relationship of author to public or reader, and, inversely, of reader or critical establishment to author.[5] Much of the speculation concerning the role of the artist within society, as discussed in the previous chapter, also implied, but did not always specify, an ethical code concerning an artist's rapport with the reading public and his responsibility either to reflect or to respond to developments in both the political and journalistic spheres. One could not hope, within the scope of this study, to come to a comprehensive understanding of the ethics of artistic engagement: debates rage over this subject well into the twentieth century. But it is crucial to understand some of the specifics of the cultural and political climate of Borel's epoch in order to re-create a working model of the ethical norms that were applied both to artists and readers during that time. That there was an awareness of

[5] An investigation of some of the ethical issues concerning the relationship of reader to author, and author to text can be found in Appendix II of this thesis. In the appendix, I have elaborated some of the recent approaches to 'the ethics of fiction', and their relation to standards that informed Borel's relationship to his reading public, to his work and to his own authorial persona.

the need to explore and re-define relationships between artist and public, and between art and other facets of culture has already been shown; and it will become clear that Borel's work focused more clearly on the questions aroused by this awareness than did the work of most other authors writing in the 1830s.

Irony and Identity: The Origins of the Myth of the 'Lycanthrope' and the Prefatory Rhetoric of *Rhapsodies*

Pétrus Borel was already a literary celebrity before the publication of his first collection of verse, *Rhapsodies*, in 1832. The myth of the *bousingos,* the *jeunes-France* and Borel's own, personal, literary myth grew further. His literary persona and narrative voices metamorphosed over time under the pressures of public reaction and critical feedback. The nickname with which Borel was popularly identified, the 'lycanthrope', grew as a 'role' in that space somewhere between reader and author, where neither pole supplied the intention that fully informed the developing caricature; instead, it developed under the pressure of hostile critical feedback and the distortions of authorial irony to become an ostensibly detached alter-ego. The character of the lycanthrope grew out of the declarations of the preface to *Rhapsodies*, and was finally put to rest two years later by Borel in his collection of short stories, *Champavert.*

The element of chance that played a role in the creation of this identity plagued Borel, yet the myth of the 'lycanthrope' and of the *jeune-France* was due as much to the artist's intentional mis-representation of himself, as it was to critical hostility or public ignorance. Borel describes, in his article 'Bruit que ces messieurs font courir' for *La Liberté*, the propensity of the 'Petit cénacle' for self-promotion.:

> Voyez-vous, depuis longtems, le public s'occupait peu de nous, non que je veuille dire que nous étions tombés en discrédit total, mais simplement dans une

> espèce d'oubli outrageant. Le gouvernement nous montrait peu de sollicitude et nous portait peu d'intérêt. La persécution retrempe une cause, le martyre la cimente et la fait triompher. Partant de ce principe, pour nous rendre intéressants et nous remettre en bonne odeur, nous avons poussés quelques inconsidérés à faire de la diatribe contre nous, à nous attaquer et vilipender dans des brochures dénuées de gros sens commun.[6]

Some time had passed between the near riot at the premier of *Hernani* in 1830, and the appearance of the *jeune-France* caricatures in the *Figaro*. In the meantime, it would appear that the artists of the 'Petit cénacle' had grown desirous of fresh scandal. As Borel explains, 'la persécution retrempe une cause'.

The situation led Borel to experiment with and to explore problems in the interpretation of authorial intention and identity; he foreshadowed theoretical issues in literature that would not become common intellectual currency until generations later. The beginnings of this exploration can be found in the preface to Borel's first book, his collection of poetry *Rhapsodies*. The preface comprises Borel's explanation of the purpose of his work. There is far less concentration on the subject matter of the poetry, than on Borel's relationship to his prospective reader. From the opening sentence, Borel emphasizes the value of his work for the reader. The literary work is a gift of uncertain value and dubious intentions, yet it holds secrets that the reader should be desirous of learning. It is the spontaneous product of the artist's soul, but it is also dangerously volatile:

> Il faut qu'un enfant jette sa bave avant de parler franc; il faut que le poète jette la sienne, j'ai jeté la mienne : la voici!...Il faut que le métal bouillonnant dans le creuset rejette sa scorie; la poésie bouillonant dans ma poitrine a rejeté la sienne: la voici!...donc, ces Rhapsodies sont de la bave et de la scorie– Oui![7]

Borel's gift is at once an offering and a retraction. The series of exclamatory images with which the preface begins figuratively force the work upon the reader, 'la

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[6]Borel, Pétrus, 'Bruit que ces messieurs font courir' in *La Liberté, journal des arts*, vol. I, 1, (1831), p. 47.

[7]Borel, Pétrus, *Rhapsodies*, p. 9.

voici!'. Borel shouts, 'Here is my work! Take it! Though it is spittle and dross, it is genuine.' The declaration is paradoxical. Borel forces upon the reader a work whose apparent value lies in his admission that it is spontaneous and without artifice. The poetry, by a force of its own, has burst forth from a hidden place, deep inside the poet: 'la poésie bouillonnant dans ma poitrine a rejeté [sa scorie]: la voici!' Yet he simultaneously divorces himself of responsibility for the technical quality of the work, in qualifying it as the refuse product of an internal, unconscious force. The qualities inherent to the art are de-emphasized, and the relationship between reader and author is drawn into sharp focus.

The supposed dynamism and spontaneity of the work's genesis represent a high degree of candour on the part of the author. Borel's apparent intentions in presenting the work to his public are simple and clear. The claim of candour and, implicitly, of sincerity, comprises one of the fundamental stipulations of the ethical 'contract' between author and reader. The author's implied sincerity demands an unguardedness on the part of the reader; the value of the work necessarily lies in the trust that the reader is willing to place in the author, given the seriousness of the literary experience he is about to undertake. In typical Romantic style, Borel implies that the value of his work lies not in its profundity or technical skill, but in the work's energy, novelty, spontaneity and the resulting value it has as a frank and accurate portrait of some inalienable element of the artist's being. It is presented, as Poulet wrote, as a consciousness that 'allows [the reader] with unheard of licence, to think what it thinks and feel what it feels'.[8] There is a tempting element of voyeurism for the reader.

But upon closer inspection, Borel's intentions are not easily defined. The relation of Borel's authorial persona to the work itself, as stated in the preface, is as

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[8] Poulet, Georges, 'Criticism and the Experience of Interiority' in *The Structuralist Controversy: The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man*, Richard Macksey and Eugene Donato, eds. (Baltimore: University of Maryland Press, 1972), p. 57.

ambiguous or paradoxical as Borel's declarations concerning his relationship to his reader. The work is forcefully presented and conditionally retracted; it is an ostensibly intense product, offered with the best and clearest intentions, and yet it is said to be garbage. It has come bursting forth from the author in a manner that leaves the reader with many questions concerning the author's relation to both his work and to the reader: what is the author's intention in presenting such a work? Is it a work of caprice or does it contain genuinely held convictions? The work's illustrations, the poem titles such as 'Sansculottide, or 'Nuit du 28 au 29', and the myth of the *bousingo* that surrounded Borel before the publication indicate a political motive, yet does the author identify himself with the content of the work? Borel declares his position regarding the work many times in the preface; but his declarations are rarely clear, and often misleading:

> Ceux qui liront mon livre me connaîtront: peut-être est-il au-dessous de moi, mais il est bien moi; je ne l'ai point fait pour le faire, je n'ai rien déguisé; c'est un tout, un ensemble, corollairement juxtaposé, de cris de douleur et de joie jetés au milieu d'une enfance rarement dissipée, souvent détournée et toujours misérable.[9]

The artist's personality is the cohesive element that lends an overarching meaning to otherwise disparate poetic themes: cries of joy and sadness; dissipation and industriousness; poverty. Yet the elements of identity that bind the poems remain as elusive as ever. Borel claims to be both within the work and above it. The paradox thus expands to encompass the author's responsibility to his text. The author claims that the work is himself, but simultaneously frees himself of responsibility for the content. Borel's position suddenly becomes clearly ironic, not in the simple, rhetorical sense, but in the Romantic and metaphysical sense. The 'self' involves a mobile perspective, encompassing a self-conscious awareness of its own multiplicity. While maintaining a critical distance from a work of dubious quality, he claims to be fully present in what he

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[9]Borel, Pétrus, *Rhapsodies*, p. 10.

says; he hides nothing: 'Je ne suis ni cynique, ni bégeule : je dis ce qui est vrai [...]'. His pretense to truth-telling conceals his duplicity.

Borel claims that the subjects of his poetry express an undefined yet vital element of his identity. Until this point, the subject matter has been less important than the forceful, rhetorical presentation of the material. Now the focus turns to the element of identity that informs the poetry; but this element is no more clearly defined than the intentions behind the 'spontaneous' and schizophrenic genesis of the work. The rhetorical performance obscures the nature of its subject, while underscoring its significance. Borel forcefully and repeatedly claims that the subjects of his poems form an ensemble that expresses his own 'moi'; yet he is hesitant to characterise himself or his relation to the work. Borel's identity is constantly, and safely, out of the reader's reach.

Slightly further on in the preface, Borel continues to obscure the nature of his 'responsibilities' to text and reader. He claims to follow no school or style; he has no artistic debts:

> Si je suis resté obscur et ignoré, si jamais personne n'a tympanisé pour moi, si je n'ai jamais été appelé aiglon ou cygne, en revanche, je n'ai jamais été le paillasse d'aucun; je n'ai jamais tambouriné pour amasser la foule autour d'un maître, nul ne peut me dire son apprenti.[10]

Borel's leadership of the *claque* for *Hernani* might lead one to another conclusion. There is an obvious hypocrisy in his denial of self-promotion or literary debt. His celebrity, and his sense of artistic conviction were tied inextricably to the violence of the polemics of Romanticism and the battles it waged. Borel was the first to provoke the forces perceived as hostile to the new school. He was remembered over a decade later by Baudelaire for his 'ton criard', the frenzied pace of his style and the deafening tone of his literary harangues, both in his polemical articles in *La Liberté* and other journals, and in his literary work. But Borel even denies responsibility for the characteristic shock of his

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[10] Ibid., p. 11.

rhetorical style. He claims that he is not given to complaining, and if he does provoke his reader, the source of his anger must be deeply and sincerely felt: '[...] pour m'arracher une plainte, il faut que mon mal soit bien cuisant [...]'[11] It appears that many things provoked a 'mal cuisant' in Borel. His sense of persecution can be seen throughout the preface.

Borel envisages a prospective reader's likely reaction to the work well before its general reception. The persecution of the *bousingo* by the forces of law on political grounds, and the ongoing series of caricatures in the popular and literary press provide ample warning of the possible nature of imminent mis-reading. Borel anticipates reader reactions and eludes the problem of negative criticism through a form of irony very similar to that which characterises the forceful and simultaneous declaration and retraction of the preface's first few lines. In the quotation already discussed, Borel responds directly to anticipated criticism:

> [...] ne va-t-on pas m'anathématiser et japer au républicain?– Pour prévenir tout interrogatoire, je dirai donc franchement: Oui, je suis républicain! [...][12]

As we have seen, Borel and his group, while flirting briefly with Saint-Simonianism and adopting the dress and habits of political radicals, never set out a political agenda for themselves. Despite their hesitation before political engagement, one must understand that political rhetoric was a powerful tool during the early 1830s. For a young artist, it was certainly tempting to attract attention by employing inflammatory political rhetoric.

Moreover, as modern readers, we must recognise the particular resonance that the term 'republican' had for the public of the 1830s. Republicanism was inseparable in the popular imagination from the memory of the Terror. The common memory of the Republic is awash with images of carnage and beheading; it was a time of arbitrary

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[11] Borel, *Rhapsodies*, p. 10.

[12] Ibid., p. 13.

arrests and swift and dubious justice. Borel's call for a return to the Republic has tremendous shock value. For the middle-class Frenchman of the early 1830s, 'republicanism' would have a similar nuance to 'Stalinism' today.

Repeatedly in the preface, Borel anticipates the hostile reaction and misunderstanding that his declarations will elicit: 'Ceux qui me jugeront par ce livre, et qui désespéreront de moi, se tromperont [...]'[13] He anticipates this hostile reception in aesthetic as well as political terms. When envisioning public appraisal of *Rhapsodies* as the diseased product of a *jeune-France* mind, Borel refers to the influence of the portrait of the *jeune-France* by the 'Figarotiers', the writers of the *Figaro*:

> Ceux qui diront: 'Ce tome est l'œuvre d'un fou, d'un de ces Bouquetins Romantiques qui ont remis l'âme et le bon Dieu à la mode, qui d'après les Figarotiers, mangent des enfans et font du grog dans des crânes. Pour ceux-là je puis les éviter, j'ai leur signalement.[14]

Borel attacks his reader vehemently in anticipation of any number of critical perspectives. He gives a list of possible reader responses, and follows this list with an enumeration of the faults of each reader, who inevitably sees in the work signs of his own fear and weakness:

> Pour ceux qui diront : C'est l'œuvre d'un Saint-Simoniaque!... pour ceux qui diront c'est l'œuvre d'un Républicain, d'un Basiléophage : il faut le tuer!... Pour ceux-là, ce seront des boutiquiers sans chalandise : les regratiers sans chalands sont des tigres!... des notaires qui perdraient tout à une reforme : le notaire est Philippiste comme un passementier!... Ce seront de bonnes gens, voyant la République dans la guillotine et les assignats. La République pour eux n'est qu'un étêtement. Ils n'ont rien compris à la haute mission de Saint-Just : ils lui reprochent quelques nécessités, et puis ils admirent les carnages de Buonaparte,- Buonaparte! et ses huit millions d'hommes tués![15]

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[13] Ibid., p. 12.

[14] Ibid., p. 14.

[15] Ibid., pp. 14-15.

Borel's political harangue targets the self-interest of merchants and notaries, whose concern with the growth of their commerce is the principal factor determining their political allegiance. He would do away with politics not because of any politically motivated idealism, but because he feels threatened in his artistic identity by economic progress. In addition, Borel's apparent republicanism is counterbalanced at times by social conservatism. In his novel, *Madame Putiphar*, he adopts many ideas from Joseph de Maistre and Ballanche, two influential, conservative theologians who speculated on crime, punishment and social upheaval in the wake of the Revolution of 1789. As we will shortly see, Borel also longs for the artistic freedom of the middle-ages. He professes a deep nostalgia for a time when, although the majority of the population toiled in servitude, the artist enjoyed freedom and patronage. Thus, Borel's 'politics', such as they are, are not even particularly consistent.

Although Borel is driven to pre-judge and to attack his reader, in the end, he must draw the reader to experience the text. His need to repulse the reader is balanced by his desire to engage him temporarily. The means by which Borel attracts the reader is through emphasizing his own 'sincerity'. His spontaneity implies a consequent, unmitigated 'truth'. The work pretends to afford a privileged glimpse into the complicated, Romantic soul of an artist who finds himself assaulted from all sides because of the strength of his convictions. Through the force of his rhetoric, Borel demands the full and undivided attention of his reader. Yet Borel does not reciprocate. He is eager to pre-judge his reader, and he is deliberately misleading with regard to his own intentions. Furthermore, he obscures the relationships that would most interest a reader of his own epoch. He claims to respond to his reader's desire to see him clarify his political position: 'pour prévenir tout interrogatoire [...]'. He apparently senses that

in a period of political instability the reader's desire for closure, specifically for certainty and thus security with respect to possible political meanings, is all the more acute.

Borel's goal, then, is to lure his reader to the experience of the text; shock the reader, and expose the arbitrariness of his preconceptions; and then slip away. Borel expresses his desire to deny the possibility of further dialogue through a declaration that, in its final and inarguable truth, would silence response from his readership:

> Alors pourquoi à bon escient s'inculper vis à vis [sic] de la foule? pourquoi ne pas taire et anéantir?– C'est que je veux rompre pour toujours avec elles; c'est que, parâtre que je suis, je veux les exposer, et en détourner la face [...][16]

There is something that foreshadows Joseph Conrad in this premise. Borel claims to strive for that momentous utterance that would so perfectly characterise his life, his identity, and the inadequacy of his audience that further communication would be unnecessary. It is the struggle of Lord Jim who, feeling persecuted for his identity which he feels the product of a chance, inescapable lapse of judgement, flees deeper and deeper into the remote areas of the known world. He, too, contemplates that earth-shattering utterance toward which all his life had been a struggle; his attempts to convey precisely the innocence of his lapse comprise a life-long pursuit that reveals for him the inadequacies of language in capturing identity.

Borel refuses to allow a closure of meaning. He feigns participation in a closure that would clarify the nature of his friendship with his reader; and that would subsequently solidify the narrative contract and the previously discussed 'circuit of communication'. If the reader can 'grasp [his] meaning completely, then [he is] bound in what has been said-- that is, [he is] positively free therein.' Borel appears to be fulfilling these conditions, but his irony allows him to avoid being entirely bound in them.

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[16]Ibid., p. 9.

Borel elides closure while employing a rhetorical style emphatic and polemical enough in appearance to imply conviction. The series of similes, exclamations and emphatic affirmations that comprise his personal republicanism forcefully present an image that is made sharper with each comparison or negation. Yes! Borel is republican! But not a republican of the July Days, nor perorator of meeting halls nor planter of poplars! For him, republicanism means an unprecedented degree of liberty. His republicanism is lycanthropy! The final analogy cannot but disappoint any expectation of a sharpening metaphorical focus on Borel's political nature. Lycanthropic republicanism presents Borel as more savage and unpredictable than would make his *bourgeois* readers comfortable.

In the preface, Borel repeatedly affirms the inability of the reader to judge him, either artistically or politically. Yet, the responsibility for the impossibility of such judgment lies invariably with Borel and with the mobility of his irony:

> Ceux qui me jugeront [...] se tromperont [...]. Je ne fait pas de la modestie, car pour ceux qui m'accuseront de métagraboliser, j'ai ma conviction de poëte, j'en rirai.[17]

Borel's ambivalence concerning the value of his literary work (his attitude that he lies somewhere between great talent and worthlessness), and more particularly his ambivalent willingness to represent its value to the reader informs the entire rhetorical style of his preface. He anticipates the reader's possible objection to his rhetorical paradoxes: 'métagraboliser' springs from 'métabole', and means the stringing together of often incongruous metaphors to illustrate a single point. Borel shows a sharp awareness of the elusiveness that the reader will perceive when reading his work, but his insouciance in this regard is plain. His ironic perspective frees him from the tyranny of the insensitivities of caricature, professionally interested or politically conservative criticism.

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[17]Borel, Pétrus, *Rhapsodies*, p. 12.

He draws the reader close to his fiction with a promise of sincerity, or inversely he forces the fiction upon him with the engaging force of his rhetoric, but when the reader attempts to define precisely Borel's presence within the text, the presence eludes him. Borel has the last laugh.

The Poetry of Rhapsodies

The poems of *Rhapsodies* must be examined primarily within the context of the 'Borelian' irony and the relation between artist and critic or public as it was explored in the preface, and also with the larger cultural context in mind. The textual examination of *Rhapsodies* outside of this context bears little fruit for two reasons: firstly, Borel produced very little verse beyond this first collection. He exhibited little technical, poetic innovation or evolution; thus, textual observations rarely reveal the sort of repeated patterns that would facilitate any definitive conclusions about Borel as a poet; secondly, there is little evidence that Borel exercised much influence on subsequent poets in terms of prosodic technique. But it is crucial to examine the full development of Borel's literary response to the difficulties he encountered in reception and criticism of his work. Future authors, such as Flaubert, Baudelaire and the Surrealists appreciated the literary strategies he adopted in responding to these problems. Borel's ironic strategies developed rapidly over the course of his short career, and were fuelled with each new publication by the misinterpretation that he provoked. *Rhapsodies* begins the contentious dialogue, and in the collection we find the primitive beginnings of Borel's irony in a form that presents interesting contrasts and comparisons with the work of more typical and more celebrated figures of Romanticism, from whom his irony would sharply diverge. The power of the literary press over public opinion and reception of the work was a phenomenon that continued to grow throughout the nineteenth century. Borel was a

pioneer of literary strategy regarding the development of journalism and cultural attitudes.

Not all the poems within the collection need concern this study. The greater part of the collection is decidedly uneven, and a large number of the poems treat uncomplicated, sentimental themes in language that was already clichéd by the early 1830s. Nevertheless, there are many poems in the collection that, while conventional in terms of imagery and versification, offer significant evidence to my argument.

We may see irony in Borel as addressing the problem of making a meaning available to a certain audience while hiding that meaning from all others, or presenting them with a different meaning. Statements in both the preface and the poetry of the collection describe the small number of prospective readers for whom Borel's irony makes his work, his meaning and his identity less elusive. Within the poems themselves, Borel employs distinct tones when addressing his two sorts of prospective reader: the familiar and the hostile. Each poem is dedicated to a close friend or a member of Borel's artistic fraternity - Léon Clopet, Eugène Devéria, Alphonse Brot; and many of the poems begin with excerpts from works by his little known contemporaries, such as Augustus MacKeat or Nerval. The poems themselves are addressed to and treat themes unique to the minor Romantics.

As we shall see, Borel expresses effusive praise and gratitude to a small number among his audience, while his reactions to the rest are duplicitious if not overtly hostile. In the preface to *Champavert*, Borel claims that his alter-ego, the lycanthrope, was as implacable and savage in his hatred toward society as he was loving and grateful to a small coterie of literary comrades.[18] The prologue to the collection is a poem thanking Clopet for his charity during a time of hardship. In addition, Borel favours revolutionaries. Quite naturally, in the context of Romanticism, he would feel kinship with artists rebelling against classicism and aesthetic orthodoxy. But there is an

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[18]Ibid., p. 10

interesting nuance to this typically Romantic sympathy; Borel favours anarchic revolution, and in fact depicts primitivism in nostalgic terms for reasons that will be explored in greater depth shortly. He yearns for a variety of Rousseauian primitivism that includes a necessary simplicity and clarity in interpersonal and social relationships. 'Je suis républicain parce que je ne puis pas être caraïbe'.[19] Borel recognises art as a social phenomenon, bound by implicit contracts, and yet its social nature imposes constraints by which he cannot abide. In the poem 'Odelette', he longs for the social hierarchy of the Middle Ages, where the greatest number toiled in servitude, but the poet enjoyed freedom from the constraints of modern social contracts:

> Oh! que n'ai-je vécu dans le beau moyen âge,
> Age heureux du poète, âge du troubadour!
> Quand tout ployait sous l'esclavage
> Lui seul n'avait que le servage
> De sa lyre et de son amour.[20]

Borel's awareness of the difficulty of art as a social phenomenon, with the ethical context that it entails, leads him to yearn for a form of cultural or political solitude. Borel is the author of the most highly regarded French translation of *Robinson Crusoe*;[21] there is little coincidence in his choice of this noble, solitary and primitive subject. He expresses, in his short stories, his affinity for primitive peoples and for mysticism. The first germs of his characters 'Jaquez Barraou', or 'Three-Fingered Jack, l'obiman' can be found in his poetry. The aging soldier who is pursued by brigands in the lonely wilds of Corsica in the poem 'La Corse'[22] demonstrates Borel's love of solitary, wild places, and rural life. The heroism and liberty of medieval Brittany is the backdrop for Borel's poem 'Le Vieux ménétrier breton'.

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[19]Ibid., p. 13.

[20]Ibid., p. 115,

[21]Defoé, Daniel, *Robinson Crusoë*, transl. Pétrus Borel (Paris: F. Borel and A. Varenne, 1836).

[22]*Rhapsodies*, p. 67.

Souvenez-vous, enfans de l'Armorique,
Que la Bretagne est le champ du repos;
Souvenez-vous que, de son sol magique,
La Gaule a vu jaillir mille héros.
La liberté, qui chérit ce rivage,
De ses rameaux couvre vos jeunes ans.
Des Duguesclin gardez bien l'héritage,
Car cette terre est vierge de tyrans![23]

Borel evokes the intermingling spiritual and linguistic heritage of the Celtic Bretons. The poem underlines Borel's image of medieval and Celtic civilisation as a source of liberty and integrity.[24] Despite the servitude of the peasant class, Borel appreciated the waywardness, solitude and freedom of the medieval poet. The societal structure of feudalism and of the *ancien régime*, given the commonplace of patronage of the arts by the noble and wealthy, allowed the artist an amount of independence and integrity that was all but extinct during Borel's time. For Borel, the struggles of Celtic cultures to preserve their language and heritage in the face of modernisation or the threat of expansion of larger cultures represents the struggle to preserve the medievalism that fosters his image of the artist's role.

The artists with whom Borel felt kinship, and the artistic roles in which he felt comfortable are clearly portrayed in his poetry. Borel's enemies are less easily defined, but those that he mistrusts, and those that he subsequently makes the targets of his irony necessarily include anyone whose interests conflict with the interests of the struggling artist. Within his poems he attacks Louis-Philippe and the nobility: 'Vous de la royauté charogne, vrais corbeaux';[25] the Chamber of Deputies ('Justice'); the Institute ('Octave'): 'Fabricateurs à plat de Romains et de Grecs';[26] shopkeepers, merchants and the entire

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[23] Ibid., p. 143

[24] This image of Celtic civilisation is the basis for his novel, *Madame Putiphar*, which depicts the persecution of the Irish under the remnants of English feudalism in the 18th century. See chs. 4 and 5 of this thesis.

[25] *Rhapsodies*, p. 189.

[26] Ibid., p. 124.

urban middle class: 'bourgeois à menton glabre'.[27] In large part because commerce, industry and politics exercised a new and sudden influence upon art, Borel was the first French poet to attack the *bourgeoisie* and their interests with such vituperative force. There is something in Borel that foreshadows the viciousness of the affronts to *bourgeois* morality in Baudelaire, Lautréamont and Huysmans.

Before examining the ways in which Borel manipulates his literary 'friendship' or contract with an adversarial readership, it is necessary to understand exactly how he views that friendship and its problems. First it is important to clarify and define more precisely the relationship between Borel and his reader. We will begin with some of the simplest manifestations of Borel's portrayal of his relationship with his public: the symbolic, metaphorical representation of the poet and his audience within the poetry. The imagistic and metaphorical aspects are the most straightforward symptoms of Borel's literary quandaries, and provide an interesting contrast with similar images in the works of more famous, contemporary Romantics.

The peculiar ironies of Borel's own literary, seductive strategy elicit a new portrait of the poet's rapport with the desired object; he tests his bond with the characters whose recognition of his own artistic gift fuels his inspiration. Borel's inspiration, as well as his relationship with a contentious readership, are sources of dual impulses and of frustration. Borel introduces a sharp note of anxiety into his dialogue with the poetic muse.

The representation of the male poet's rapport with femininity, embodying carnal love, inspiration and the nurturing support that the artist receives from a comprehending and appreciative public, was less duplicitous or fraught with conflict among the major figures of earlier Romanticism than among Borel's contemporaries. As represented in Musset's 'Poète prends ton luth...', the poet of the first generation of French Romantics

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[27]Ibid., p. 127.

enjoyed a generally more harmonious and less self-conscious relationship with creative inspiration. This is due to the relatively unexamined relationship between poet and reader among the first Romantics: the poet contemplated grand themes such as solitude or, through a surplus of narcissism, imagined himself at the forefront of society, a species of moral and aesthetic guide, '[celui] qui lit dans les astres la route que nous montre le doigt du Seigneur'.[28] It would be absurd to say that Vigny and Musset did not represent the solitude and ostracism of the poet as a symbol of his difficult relationship with an uncomprehending public. *Chatterton*, written in 1834, concerns this theme.[29] The failure of Musset's *Nuit vénitienne*, and his refusal thereafter to stage his plays, speaks little of harmony and understanding between artist and public. But the sharp focus of irony and savagery upon the public found in Borel surpasses what had come before in Romanticism, and is reflective of the changing cultural position of the artist.

In the work of Borel, as in the work of other minor Romantics of the period, the poet's ostracism was not unequivocally exhilarating as it often was for the seer/poet in Hugo or Vigny. In Borel, the poet's condition is described in physical terms; here, the reader often encounters frustrating isolation, penury and hunger:

> C'est un oiseau, le Barde! il doit vieillir austère,
> Sobre, pauvre, ignoré, farouche, soucieux,
> Ne chanter pour aucun, et n'avoir rien sur terre
> Qu'une cape trouée, un poignard et les Cieux!
> [...]
> Le barde ne grandit qu'enivré de besoin![30]

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[28]de Vigny, Alfred, *Œuvres complètes*, 2 vols. (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1950), vol. I, p. 836.

[29]It is crucial to note that this play, written in 1834, does examine some of the same problems with literary reception and professional criticism that appear in the work of Borel and his companions. Chatterton is misunderstood, like any Romantic hero, but he is persecuted in the critical press. A reviewer claims to have revealed a literary fraud in accusing Chatterton of having stolen his works from a 16th century author, who had in turn borrowed heavily from an 11th century monk. The accusation is devastating to the artist, and brings about his suicide.

[30] Borel, Pétrus, *Rhapsodies*, p. 110.

Borel considers physical suffering and poverty as parts of a process of artistic maturation, but they are also conditions whose necessity he often questions. Borel's isolation and uncertainty provoke crises of terror in the face of physical sacrifice:

> Je n'entends que mon râle et le bruit de mon cœur.
> Je penche, je faiblis, courbé par la douleur.
> Dieu! que l'homme est piteux en un désert immense!
> Dieu! que l'homme est débile au souffle du malheur![31]

The figure of the pelican in Musset's poem of the same name turns figurative suffering into a glorious, artistic martyrdom. Suffering is balanced by spiritual exhiliration. The grandiloquence and narcissism of many of the greater figures of the movement precluded concrete, physical concerns. The change of attitude in the 1830s can be attributed in some part to the actual financial difficulties that Borel and his companions faced. They indeed relied upon journalism and upon critical reception to feed themselves. Journalism expanded astonishingly, and for the first time, for a large number of artists, it was possible to support a literary career, at least in part, through submitting fiction and critical articles to periodicals. Given the new economics of literary art, a writing career was open to more people; but for the vast majority money was scarce. In addition, artists relied more than ever on the new power of journalism and on professional criticism to enhance the publicity surrounding their work. But, as suggested earlier, a new breed of professionally interested critics and journalists appeared whose interests were not decidedly focused upon the well-being of the artist. Literature took refuge in journalism, but it was at times a hazardous refuge. During this generation, the modern notion of the starving artist and the penurious and misunderstood *poète maudit* was born, due in part to the complex influence of the literary press.

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[31]Borel, Pétrus, *Rhapsodies*, p. 102.

The first poem of Borel's collection, 'Prologue, à Léon Clopet' underscores this theme: the destitute artist in search of a haven. The poem displays little innovativeness in terms of versification or imagery, but the theme is significant. Borel describes the suffering that he endures for the sake of his artistic integrity:

> Je le veux, afin qu'on sache
> Que je ne suis point un lâche,
> Car j'ai deux parts de douleur
> A ce banquet de la terre;
> Car, bien jeune, la misère
> N'a pu briser ma verdeur.[32]

He ignores an audience of patrons, and the gifts of wealth or favours of influence that they bring. He prefers to suffer rather than make his art conform to popular tastes in exchange for money. Borel demonstrates an apparent pride in his frankness, reminiscent of the preface and of its tone of sincerity. But, as always, there is a note of provocation:

> Quoi! ma franchise te blesse?
> Voudrais-tu que, par faiblesse,
> On voilât sa pauvreté?
> Non, non, nouveau Malfilâtre,
> Je veux, au siècle parâtre,
> Etaler ma nudité![33]

Nudity refers not only to poverty, but to the clarity of the artist's intention, the sincerity with which he presents the artistic gift. Ironically, this frankness which would ostensibly facilitate his relationship with his reader is contentious: 'Quoi! ma franchise te blesse?' Borel's 'veracity' disguises his assault upon his reader's sensibilities. Borel's rhetoric presents his literature as free of artifice; his figurative 'nudity' implies a candour which, while titillating the voyeuristic tendencies of the reader, demands little wariness. Borel presents himself as defenceless, and thus diminishes the reader's sense of a need for self-protection.

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[32]Ibid., p. 20.

[33]Ibid.

If Borel were a Romantic of the previous generation, one could envisage that artistic integrity would suffice to counter the physical pangs of deprivation; one could not reasonably imagine Hugo's *ego scriptor* pausing to contemplate his own growling stomach. But Borel's precarious position, and the duality of his impulses, cause him to do just that. The final image of the final poem in the collection, 'Misère', recounts the disastrous effect that public miscomprehension of his talent and of his originality have on his ability to produce art and to support himself:

> [...]– Allons, on ne croit plus,
> En ce siècle voyant qu'aux talens révolus.
> Travaille, on ne croit plus aux futures merveilles.–
> Travaille!...Eh! le besoin qui me hurle aux oreilles,
> Etouffant tout penser qui se dresse en mon sein!
> Aux accords to mon luth que répondre?...j'ai faim![34]

Borel refers, sarcastically, to the 'siècle voyant', the nineteenth century as the breeding ground of Romantic 'seers' and as a century looking continually forward as it is furiously swept along the currents of historical upheaval. But in these lines, as always, the focus is on the neglect or hostility of his reading public; the author is misunderstood, and despite his enthusiasm and his industriousness, he faces starvation.

The female figure in Borel's poetry takes on many of the characteristics of Borel's hostile readership. She is the source of his inspiration, yet she invariably scorns him. In the poem 'Doléance', the angelic hand of a woman evokes the '[s]on joyeux, importun, d'un clavecin sonore'[35] to whose rhythm the worldly, *bourgeois* festival dances, distracting the poet in his labours and emphasizing his solitude. The rewards of the poet who models his work to popular tastes are '[j]oyaux, bals, fleurs, cheval, château, fine maîtresse',[36] all things that Borel rejects at one time, but longs for at others. In a poem

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[34]Ibid., p. 194.

[35]Ibid., pp. 73-75.

[36]Ibid., p. 110.

that Borel never published, 'Léthargie de la muse', Borel elaborates his difficulties with his source of inspiration and with his audience.[37] The poem was most likely written in the late 1840s, and comes at the end of a literary career that saw Borel exhaust his sources of inspiration, due in large part to the fury of his attacks on his readership, and to his contingent propensity for figurative self-destruction. The poem is printed, along with 'Poésies diverses', at the end of Aristide Marie's edition of *Rhapsodies* (Paris: La Force Française, 1922). In the poem, Borel implores a muse who is inured to the frenzy of his literary polemics.

> A ranimer la muse en vain je m'évertue,
> Elle est sourde à mes cris et froide sous mes pleurs:
> Sans espoir je me jette aux pieds d'une statue
> Dont le regard sans flamme avive mes douleurs.[38]

Borel regrets his earlier, controversial attitudes, recognising that his fierce desire for solitude and his aggression perhaps alienated him from his artistic voice:

> M'a-t-elle vu jamais, à l'heure où je frissonne
> Criant sous l'ongle aigu de l'âpre adversité,
> Porter envie à tous et secours à personne,
> Et mettre à nu mon cœur vide et désenchanté?
>
> Ai-je, méprisant l'art, dans un jour de colère,
> Méconnu sa puissance et nié qu'il soit fort?
> Ai-je dit que la gloire étant un vain salaire,
> Aucun but ne valait la peine d'un effort?[39]

In an earlier poem of Borel's, the questions would have been less sincerely probing. 'Léthargie de la muse' expresses his regret at the envy and self-imposed solitude of his youth. I shall discuss more fully the implications of Borel's fatally destined career in the fourth and fifth chapters of this thesis. In his final, substantial work and only novel,

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[37] The poem was apparently given to René Ponsard, whom Borel knew during his time as inspector of colonisation in Algeria. It appeared for the first time in Clarétie, Jules, *Pétrus Borel le lycanthrope*.

[38] Ibid., p. 233.

[39] Ibid.

Madame Putiphar, the transformation of his attitude toward his reader across time is clear. Typically, Borel moves between extremes: from the aggressive provocation of his first works to the attempt to engage the reader unequivocally with the tropes of melodrama in his novel. Borel's final attitude is despairing resignation. His muse remains elusive.

When he does describe the woman for whom he yearns in *Rhapsodies*, she is not a product of urban culture, but represents the solitude and Romantic aestheticism that are dear to him:

> Ce n'est point au théâtre, aux fêtes qu'est la fille
> Qui pourrait sur ma vie épancher le bonheur :
> C'est aux champs, vers le soir, groupée en sa mantille,
> Un Werther à la main sous le saule pleureur.[40]

But Borel never apparently engages with an audience, or with his object of desire, in the unmitigated fashion that a shared aestheticism would have facilitated. His truculence leaves him painfully alone. In the poem 'Désespoir', Borel represents the physical suffering brought on by his desire for a readership which is, however, incapable of appreciating him. The poet's solitude weighs upon him, and he is tormented by his sexual appetite, and just as importantly, by a desire for recognition. The unfulfilled desire for appreciation elicits both the physical hunger described previously, and a more spiritual longing:

> Comme une louve ayant fait chasse vaine,
> Grinçant des dents, s'en va par le chemin;
> Je vais, hagard, tout chargé de ma peine,
> Seul avec moi, nulle main dans ma main;
> Pas une voix qui me dise: 'A demain.'
>
> [...]
> Ce long tourment me ronge et me déchire,
> M'abîme entier! Que le sort m'est cruel!
> Même aujourd'hui, riant de mon délire,
> Pour retremper mon âme dans le fiel,

[40]Ibid., p. 84.

Il m'a fait voir un ange du ciel.[41]

The wolf brings to mind the poem of Vigny, wherein the wolf-image serves to underline the poet's stoicism, his martyrdom and his solitude. Borel's image shares in these ideas, but the focus is on appetite, physical suffering and on the absence of companionship. The poet's desire for literary recognition, for companionship, functions under these same conditions and subsequently oscillates between two extreme poles: intimacy and rejection. Borel contemplates tearing a woman from the arms of her lover.

A mes désirs lascifs je voudrais tout plier
[...]
Arracher une femme au bras d'un cavalier.[42]

From this violent projection of his frustration outwards, onto the object of his desire, he turns abruptly inward:

Désirs poignans, silence! il faut vous taire.
De feux en vain je me sens embrasé,
Allons gémir sur mon lit solitaire;
Baigné de pleurs mon corps est épuisé:
A ce combat tout mon cœur s'est brisé![43]

Borel's contradictory impulses toward the reader oscillate between outward aggression and figurative self-flagellation. His vituperative assaults on his reader are often juxtaposed with a turning of his anger upon himself, and often with metaphorical self-mutilation. Ostracized from the crowd of revellers, representative of the *bourgeois* public who shower praise upon superficial and modish artists, Borel berates himself for not having the courage to commit suicide:

Eh! moi, plus qu'un enfant, capon, flasque, gavache,

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[41]Ibid., p. 57-8.

[42]Ibid., p. 58.

[43]Ibid.

De ce fer acéré
Je ne déchire pas avec ce bras trop lâche
Mon poitrail ulcéré!
Je rumine mes maux : son ombre est poursuivie
D'un geindre coutumier.
Qui donc me rend si veule et m'enchaîne à la vie?...
Pauvre Job au fumier![44]

Borel certainly sees himself as a persecuted figure like Job. He is attacked from without and from within. His paranoia and his self-destructive tendencies culminate in the portrayal of the literary suicides in *Champavert*; the element of sado-masochism that it implies continues in Borel's later work. As we shall see in his novel *Madame Putiphar*, he expresses strong feelings of literary kinship with de Sade.

The movement between two poles – acceptance and rejection (or similarly between interiority and exteriority, being the contradictory drive toward both outward aggression and self-destruction) is not controlled entirely by the artist, nor entirely by the desired object. An element of chance, expressed in the typically Romantic notion of an unfathomably complex destiny ('unendlich vollen Chaos'[45]) – occupies the space between the two. The poet sees one method of overcoming the humiliating arbitrariness of his literary destiny:

Ma jeunesse me pèse et devient importune!
Ah! que n'ai-je du moins le calme d'un vieillard.
Qu'ai-je à faire ici-bas?...traîner dans l'infortune;
Lâche, rompons nos fers!...ou plus tôt ou plus tard.
– Mes pistolets sont là...déjouons le hasard!!![46]

There are echoes of these images of age, chance and hopelessness many years later in Baudelaire. A similar, fatal course of action in the face of persecution appears in the final stanza of 'L'Horloge':

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[44]'Doléance', ibid., p. 75.

[45]See note 4, above.

[46]Ibid., p. 59.

> Tantôt sonnera l'heure où le divin Hasard
> Où l'auguste Vertu, ton épouse encor vierge,
> Où le Repentir même (oh! dernière auberge!)
> Où tout te dira : Meurs, vieux lâche, il est trop tard![47]

Borel's response to his contentious relationship with his public, and to the distortion to which his literary persona and his work were subject, exercised a long-running influence in later literature.

For Borel, suicide becomes the final means of overcoming chance and of preserving the integrity that his desire to share himself and his literary gifts have endangered. There is far less emphasis here upon martyrdom and subsequently a less noble pathos than is found in the Romantic literary suicides of authors from the previous generation. Vigny's Chatterton commits suicide to preserve himself from the humiliation of accusations of plagiarism. Truth lies undeniably with him. Though he feels acute pain, the arbitrariness of the indignities that he suffers is not the focus of his fear, nor is it the determining factor of his literary suicide. Likewise, death is not a leap into the unknown simply to escape the humiliating effects of chance, but is a blissful state that brings peace of mind and is, in the end, an affirmation of Chatterton's glory:

> Salut, première heure de repos que j'ai goûtée!– Dernière heure de ma vie, l'aurore du jour éternel, salut!– Adieu humiliation, haines, sarcasmes, travaux dégradants, incertitudes, angoisses, misères, tortures du cœur, adieu! Oh! quel bonheur, je vous dis adieu![48]

In both Vigny and Borel, suicide is a Romantic act, exhibiting a similar egotism. The characters of both authors flee the indignities of a society where mundane, degrading tasks and the pressures of social obligation make life unbearable for the Romantic egotist. But in Borel, suicide is fraught with fear and uncertainty; and in the work of a small

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[47]Baudelaire, Charles, *OC*, vol. I, p. 81.

[48]de Vigny, Alfred, *OC*, vol. I, p. 839.

number of other authors of the 1830s, particularly Lassailly, there is a similar hesitation and vertigo before the abyss of death. In Borel's poem 'Heur et Malheur', the narrator examines this transformation in the Romantic outlook:

> J'ai caressé la mort, riant au suicide,
> Souvent et volontiers, quand j'étais plus heureux;
> Maintenant je la hais, et d'elle suis peureux,
> Misérable et miné par la faim homicide.[49]

It is not an ascension to glory, but an undignified retreat from the physical pain and appetite that are aggravated by chance. As we shall soon see, the physicality of Borel's suffering becomes acute enough to cause him to seek out the preferable nothingness of death. There is no necessary moral elevation, only fear, flight and uncertainty. An element of panic and horror appears in Romantic literature with the arrival of Borel.

Borel's sense of persecution, and his self-destructiveness, lead naturally to an examination of the problems of the author's view of his responsibilities to his reader and to his art. Borel's own artistic identity incorporated and at times welcomed the isolation and deprivation that his provocative character brought upon him. I have described the adversarial position with his public into which Borel felt himself pushed; and at least in some instances it was more nurturing to Borel's sense of artistic integrity to portray himself as wrongly judged in the eyes of the public, as opposed to being an elusive and contentious provocateur. But Borel was never entirely comfortable with a single identity, and the convictions that he showed in the necessary suffering and isolation in one poem, would be contradicted only a few poems later. In his portrayal of a carefree passion (rather less convincing than the vertiginous terror seen in previous poems), Borel temporarily rejects the 'English' morbidity that he so often embraces:

> Qu'un Anglais trace sur la tombe
> Des vers sombres comme ses jours;
> Moi, toujours,

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[49]Borel, *Rhapsodies*, p. 111

Sur des fleurs ma lyre retombe,
Je n'ai que la soif des amours![50]

The poem 'La Soif des amours' presents the endearing Borel; he beckons his reader, and displays a playfulness and lightness of heart that is rarely present in his work.

Borel is well aware of his inconsistencies. His irony is focused not only upon his reader, but upon his own divisive and self-propagating artistic identities. Nevertheless, there are certain literary, moral constants in Borel that fuel the irony. Borel exhibits a species of realism in the graphic and detailed portrayal of death and suffering; the rhetoric through which he presents his work as sincere, spontaneous and 'true' also foreshadows the pretext of the 'truth' of 'realism'. It is vital to turn again to this pretext. The imagery and prosodic technique in Borel's poetry is not nearly as important as the figurative description of the way in which he views his relationship with his reader. In fact, it is precarious to interpret Borel metaphorically or imagistically at all, he changes so quickly and so often. Instead, the real value of Borel's work lies in the manner in which he symbolically recreates the dynamics and the hazards of literary reception through a manipulation of the 'ethical contract' between him and his reader. If the reader is drawn to the work, unsuspecting of Borel's artifice, then the work will necessarily exercise a more profound emotional effect. The reader is more easily shaken in his moral complacency. Again, we are reminded of Baudelaire, 'Hypocrite lecteur, mon semblable, mon frère!' Borel's desire to shock his reader, and to make the reader understand and experience the way in which he sees the world must be understood in the terms of Borel's literary ethics.

The ever-present element of chance, which underwrites the relationship between Borel and his reader, causes him to focus upon terrestrial, moral quandaries. Cynicism, nihilism and agnosticism pervade Borel's poetry. Without moral certainty, there is no

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[50]Ibid., p. 152.

martyrdom, no faith and certainly no greater glory beyond life. Plagued by the fear and vertigo of his own uncertainty, Borel is guided by contradictory impulses, driving him either to escape the complexities that arbitrariness brings to the ethical context of literary relations, or to try to reverse the debasing effects of the paradoxical dynamics within those relations. Borel's escape is epitomised in his rejection of culture and politics. But the second strategy is by far the more interesting. In this second case, Borel attempts to turn the indignity back upon the reader. He sows the seeds of uncertainty in the reader's mind, and presents him with a moral alternative that is alluring yet threatening.

The reflections on mortality and morality in Borel's poem 'Rêveries' reveal a perspective born of uncertainty. The finality of death as a moral parametre is clear from the first verse: 'La mort sert de morale aux fables de la vie.'[51] The moment of death itself acts as the final arbiter of moral problems. In Borel's later work, it becomes increasingly evident that there is no possibility for moral judgment incorporating ideas of existence beyond physical life; the anticipation of physical death thus conditions all aspects of Borel's work. A sense of morbidity underscores many of Borel's ideas; graphic imagery of the disturbing physical aspects of death are the symptoms of this preoccupation. There are superficial and imagistic correspondences in this respect between Borel and Baudelaire. Some critics have clung to a shared catalogue of charnel-house imagery as evidence of literary parentage, but the spiritual aspects crucial to Baudelaire (Baudelaire's view of the fallen, Satanic nature of his own dark humour and irony) are absent in Borel.[52]

In 'Rêveries', the focus upon the the importance of death and its direct relation to the reader sharpens systematically with each stanza. Beginning with general remarks on

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[51]Ibid., p. 97.

[52]There is a moral and spiritual convergence between the two authors in the later work of Borel. His views on religion and on expiation develop considerably between his first two published works and his novel of 1839, *Madame Putiphar*. Borel borrows many ideas from Joseph de Maistre, who exercised a strong influence on Baudelaire. The liminary poem to *Madame Putiphar* examines a psychic conflict within the poet that is akin to Baudelaire's 'spleen et idéal'. It is thus unsurprising that Baudelaire's highest praise was reserved for certain portions of Borel's only novel, for which other creative artists had less appreciation.

the arbitrariness of death, and the manner in which its finality underwrites all expectation in life, the poem grows quickly more specific in its images and metaphors, finally narrowing in directly upon the reader, and placing him specifically in this disturbing context. In the first stanza, death is the supreme and silent arbiter that equalises the fates both of the conquered and the conqueror:

> Le monde est une mer où l'humble caboteur,
> Pauvre, va se traînant du cirque au promontoire;
> Où le hardi forban croise sous l'équateur,
> Gorgé du sang du faible, et d'or expiatoire.-
> Mort, suprême bourreau! [...]
> Basse fosse où tout va...mort sourde au cri du lâche![53]

For Borel, the role of death, its arbitrary and concretising appearance, takes precedence over any human efforts to shape moral meaning. The final image of the first stanza emphasizes the equality of men before death, but also captures the futility of their efforts to create a moral context. That is the job of physical extinction:

> Tous les êtres sont pairs devant ta [la mort] juste hache,
> L'homme et le chien![54]

The comparison between man and animal emphasizes the impotence of rationality faced with an indecipherable and cruel destiny. Death is more directly responsible for shaping the moral nature of life than is human action, because the sense of an ending, and its place within a narrative can do as much or more to determine meaning as did the preceding content. Man's futile efforts at deciphering this arbitrariness of death show that he has little control over the moral significance of his time on earth:

> Naître, souffrir, mourir, c'est tout dans la nature
> Ce que l'homme perçoit; car elle est un bouquin
> Qu'on ne peut déchiffrer; un manuscrit arabe
> Aux mains d'un muletier : hors le titre et la fin,
> Il n'interprète rien, rien, pas une syllabe.[55]

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[53]Ibid., p. 97.

[54]Ibid.

The focus is sharpened yet further in the final stanza. The reader is brought directly into the context of what had at first appeared a bleak but unfocused rant on the futility of comprehending death's role in life. From the outset, Borel hides many of the conditions of his fictional universe, but cleverly binds the reader to those unspecific conditions by offering something that appears enticing at first glance: the occasion to share and to judge the sincerely recounted experiences of a suffering, complex and misunderstood artistic mind. Quickly, the conditions grow clear and the tables are turned. At the end of the poem, it is Borel who sits in judgement on a reader who has accepted the conditions of participation in his fatalistic literary world. Borel himself becomes the 'ogre appelé Dieu'. He shows little mercy on the reader, whom he suddenly addresses in the second person:

> Un ogre appelé Dieu vous garde un autre sort!
> Moins de prétentions, allons, race servile,
> Peut-être avant longtemps, votre tête de mort
> Servira de jouet aux enfans par la ville!...
> Peu vous importe, au fait, votre vil ossement;
> Qu'on le traÓne au bourbier, qu'on le frappe et l'écorne...

The idea of evil is the primordial philosophical principle in Borel's literary universe. It is a principle that works according to the chance whims of an ill-willed deity. Borel's claim to portray cruelty is in the name of realism and truth. Yet the hazards visited upon humanity by an ogre-like God are of an illusory realism. Borel has carefully written chance into the texture of his philosophical scheme, and thus the reader is led to accept events that would perhaps seem incongruous in any other context. Borel controls the workings of a fate whose indignities he saves for the reader.

Chance and absurdity play a huge role in Borel's apparent moral schema:

> La vie est un champ clos de milliaires semé,

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[55]Ibid., p. 98.

Où souvent le champion se brise tout armé
A l'unième...Or, voilà le destin que j'envie![56]

There is a gleeful nihilism in Borel's pronouncements on the absurdity of fate. He is at once frozen before the nothingness of death, terrified of life, yet lacking the certainty and strength that would allow him to commit suicide: '[...] la mort est pour moi sans glaive et sans secours'.[57] Despite his fear of death, he professes to envy the tragedy of the hero who stumbles on the first obstacle. The hero's premature (and again undignified) failure pleases Borel's sense of morality because the reader is complicit in the act. The defeatism of his poem does not represent a concrete philosophical position, but instead portrays the way in which Borel manipulates the reader's experience within the text. Previously, we have seen the self-destructiveness of Borel's literary alter-ego. He is self-destructive in large part because the reader invests part of himself in the literary persona that he follows and helps to re-create.

If death is understood as the moral to life's fable, and as the final arbiter of Borel's philosophical quandaries, then the element of chance is a key weapon in his literary strategy. If there is no meaning beyond death, then it takes a considerable amount of irony, in the Romantic sense, to incorporate the apparent randomness of the sort that Borel describes in 'Rêveries' into a coherent, ethical, literary metaphor that could suspend the reader's disbelief. The text already incorporates elements of paradox into this strategy. The elusiveness of Borel's identity due to his irony serves as an enticement for the reader to ignore the paradoxical, and to follow more closely what is set out before him in order finally to grasp the subject that promised so much of itself, but seems to keep just out of reach. The promise of intimacy is nearly always a trap. In the poem 'Adroit refus', Borel explains to the reader that his implacable exterior hides a feverish passion which he is willing to share:

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[56]Ibid., p. 97.

[57]Ibid., p. 93.

Ah! ne m'accusez pas d'être froid, insensible;
D'avoir l'oeil dédaigneux, le rire d'un méchant;
D'avoir un cœur de bronze à tout inaccessible;
D'avoir l'âme fermée au plus tendre penchant.
Vous me devinez peu malgré votre science :
Croyez moins désormais à cette insouciance,
J'aime, et d'un amour vif; j'en fais l'aveu touchant.[58]

Once again, Borel anticipates and queries the reader's ability to judge him. Borel offers to clarify his position, and to rectifiy the reader's misinterpretation. Yet, Borel's 'touching avowal' of his passion is hardly what one would expect:

J'aime des cris de guerre éveillant les montagnes;
J'aime enfin l'incendie, horrible volupté!
Ecraser un tyran sous sa lourde oriflamme!
Au sang de l'étranger retremper une lame,
La lui briser au cœur, en criant 'liberté!'[59]

One would perhaps have anticipated an explanation of Borel's fondness for an inaccessible woman, or the recollection of a bittersweet affair to counteract our impression of him as 'froid, insensible'. Instead, as the reader relaxes for a moment in anticipation of an avowal of some intimate, and touching secret, Borel explains that he likes to set fires and kill foreigners!

Of course, the omnipresence of irony means that there is no real means to pinpoint Borel's actual moral position. It is all rhetorical strategy. In fact, he recants all of these nihilistic and provocative statements only a few years later, in *Madame Putiphar.*[60] One cannot determine exactly what Borel's statements concerning death and the malevolence of God say about some essential qualities of Borel, the man. Attempting

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[58]Borel, *Rhapsodies*, p. 35.

[59]Ibid., pp.36-7.

[60]Paradoxically, Borel's actual moralising, when it can be examined outside the context of this particular literary strategy, is very different. Despite his self-styled 'republicanism', and although the moral speculation in his early works reveals a vaguely agnostic nihilism, Borel's only novel, *Madame Putiphar*, shows the distinct mark of some 'conservative', theological thinkers of the post 1789 period, such as Joseph de Maistre or Ballanche. See Ch. 4.

this has been the weakness of nearly all previous efforts to characterise Borel's literature through a better understanding of his elusive, ironic persona. But Borel's apparent moralising within a literary context tells us much about his relationship with his reader: Borel's moral 'framework' stipulates unpredictability as one of its first conditions; he thus allows himself the licence to expose his reader to all manner of disturbing anomalies and apparently absurd injustices, within a 'frankly' revealed and carefully expounded moral context. Borel's rather nasty morality is contingent with the expectations that he elicits in the reader while revealing the nature of his relationship to him. Borel allows himself to disturb or even abuse his reader, while binding that reader to the conditions of the narrative contract by purportedly keeping scrupulously to his own end of the bargain. He claims to offer all of himself to the reader, sincerely and without artifice. Disbelief on the reader's part is thus suspended more subtly and more wholly than had the reader suspected some form of abuse or trickery from the outset. Similarly, disbelief is suspended more totally, that is to say that the reader gives himself more completely to his experience of the work than if the work had been offered simply as a book of pure diversion or fantasy. Although the literary quality of the verse is, as I have said, uneven, nevertheless Borel does offer an apparently intense and scrupulously real experience whose literary value is, paradoxically, of the highest quality. The value is predicated on his own sincerity, frankness, and implicitly on a species of rudimentary realism ('realism' itself being a literary genre that implies a certain *a priori* value). His claim to truth and his moral speculation are pretenses that aid him in making the reader subject to a level of uncertainty and indignity of which he feels himself a victim.

Borel's Rhetorical Strategy and the Pretexts of 'Realism'

The connection between the precursors of Realism and the debates surrounding the *bousingo* and the role of the artist are strong. Balzac, during this period, was

included in newspaper caricatures among the *jeunes-France*, and the fantastic and gruesome nature of his *Contes bruns* and *La peau de chagrin* only augmented his eccentricity in the eyes of the public. And, more than Borel, Balzac was concerned with the problems of literary journalism and with the economics of the literary profession, descriptions of which formed a large part of his work. They were concerns that weighed heavily upon artists of these tumultous few years, and which brought many of them down from the dizzying heights of Romantic narcissism to contemplate the more acute, physical pangs of the penurious and suffering artist. Balzac's approach was to recount the minutiae of this cultural context: for him, genius was in the details. Borel's reaction serves as an interesting counterpoint, but like Balzac's, it had a considerable influence on the development of 'Realism' as a literary genre.

In the context of the ethics of narrative, 'Realism' must be understood as much as a pretence as it is a claim to *a priori* literary value. 'Realism' ostensibly treats its subjects in more scrupulous detail than other genres; it offers its reader a purportedly 'objective' product, free of authorial commentary, or free of emotional engagement with its subject. In some instances, it claims to be a sort of literary journalism. Yet the effects of 'Realist' literature upon the reader often stray from the objective and sober nature of its claims to existence.

Lilian Furst, author of a study in English on French Romantic Irony, and author of *Through the Lens of the Reader*, notes that students, when identifying works they find most disturbing, do not list works with predominantly violent or disturbing subject material.[61] The two most frequent subjects of complaint are invariably *Madame Bovary* and *Death in Venice*. The students do not find the subject matter in itself particularly perverse, but feel somehow betrayed by the entire experience of the work, with the horizon of expectations that it elicits, and finally betrays. The pretence to realism of each work, the scrupulous and minute recounting of detail, do not make the work any less

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[61] Furst, Lilian, *Through the Lens of the Reader* (Albany: State University Press of New York, 1992), p. 40.

fictional for the individual reader, but do serve to heighten the reader's sense of participation in the story as it unfolds. The reader's disbelief is suspended, and he is less prepared to protect himself from the emotional responses elicited by the rather gruesome or pathetic endings.

We can see the beginnings of a similar ethical strategy on the part of Borel. In a sense, his claims to spontaneity and sincerity serve a similar function with regards to the reader. In addition, *Rhapsodies*, being at the very earliest stages of his career, marks a number of tendencies that Borel will develop considerably. Much of the language and imagery that is typical of the Romantic movement will disappear in his later work. What is left is the graphic and morbid imagery, the vitality and claim to contemporaneity that characterise his politicising rhetoric, and that in some sense de-emphasize the fictionality of his work. His goal can in some sense be seen as trying to approach the potential for disturbing his reader that Lilian Furst documented in Mann and Flaubert. From this perspective, there is a connection between 'fantastic' fiction and realism. '[Le fantastique] se caractérise par une intrusion brutale du mystère dans le contexte de la vie réelle.'[62] The connection is further strengthened by those parallels that we will later consider between the work of the young Flaubert and that of Borel.

Rhapsodies was not well received by the critical establishment. There was little real scandal surrounding the book's publication. The only review of *Rhapsodies* appeared in *La Revue encyclopédique,*[63] and was decidedly mediocre. Reynaud, the author of the critique, briefly congratulates Borel on his loyalty to his artistic circle, and on the novelty of some of the poetry, but criticises that haphazard organisation of the collection. Significantly, he does mention Borel as a literary symptom of the student riots. Yet, as we shall see in the beginning of the following chapter, Borel was not entirely correct in his anticipation in the preface of *Rhapsodies* of the complaints by those who would be

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[62] Castex, Pierre-Georges, *Le Conte fantastique en France*, p. 8.

[63] Reynaud, J., 'Rhapsodies' in *La Revue encyclopédique*, 52, (1831), pp. 427-31.

threatened by his anarchic side, or by the mobility and duplicity that his irony entailed. Much of the scandal surrounding the work was exaggerated by Borel himself in the preface to *Champavert*.

In reality, there is a fascinating divergence of opinion between critics who had little involvement in creative art, but who wrote reviews largely from professional interest and thus predominantly with a mind to the likely general, public reception of Borel's work, and those critics whose interests lay more in the realm of creative art. In the final chapter of this thesis, I suggest that Baudelaire, Sainte-Beuve, Champfleury, Flaubert, Eluard, Breton and many others who wrote on Borel, both during his life and later, recognised and appreciated his ironic and iconoclastic literary strategies, while those acting as professional critics, like Reynaud, almost universally missed his irony altogether. For a short time after *Rhapsodies*, Borel played a game of hide-and-seek with critics, feeding them the outrageousness that they expected in his works, but using his irony to develop an increasingly profound gap between his literature and his infamous literary identity on the one hand, and his personal self on the other. His rhetorical provocations became more savage, and his imagery more gruesome, while his narrative and ethical strategies grew more deviously subtle and engaging, and simultaneously more disillusioning and misleading.

Thus, we turn naturally to Borel's evolving response to critical misapprehension in what I shall demonstrate to be his most influential work, *Champavert*.

Chapter 3

Pétrus Borel's *Champavert*

The ethical dimension grows considerably more complex with Borel's only collection of short stories, *Champavert*, first published in 1834, and whose subtitle is 'contes immoraux'. In this work there is a greater elaboration of Borel's relationship to his literary alter-ego, the 'lycanthrope'. In addition, Borel's ironic position regarding his reader dictates the narrative structure of his short stories. But before embarking upon an analysis of the short stories, we must focus upon the ethical standards and rhetorical effects of the preface, including an exploration of the relationships as portrayed by Borel between artist and reader; between author and narrative voice; between reader and text.

For the first time in the preface to *Champavert*, Borel devotes considerable energy to the exploration of the relationship of the writing author to the fictional narrator. He employs the nameless voice of an apparently benevolent narrator to present the fiction. The narrator, in a common frame device, claims to have found the manuscripts of the author of the short stories, and to present them to the public out of a sense of duty to uncover the mysterious circumstances surrounding the death of a controversial and troubled personality. Less common is the revelation by the narrator that the true name of the celebrated author, Pétrus Borel, is Champavert. He explains Champavert's recent suicide, and in so doing, destroys the literary alter-ego that he claims had attracted the success of scandal, yet had grown out of his control. Simultaneously, he re-presents

himself, hidden behind the nameless voice of a narrator whose intentions, as I will demonstrate, are neither as benevolent nor as clear as they at first appear. His strategy may be viewed through the optic of recent theories concerning 'The Death of the Author', but this approach bears little fruit. Structuralist and semiotically based approaches invariably focus upon the important quandary of the splintering and proliferation of the authorial persona, and upon the gaps and inconsistencies that arise within the text, but they often fail to come to grips with the motivating and dynamic forces of irony and the cultivation of desire that are crucial to Borel's work.[1] Purely structuralist or post-structuralist criticism leaves little margin for consideration of the effects that the predominant focus by writers like Borel upon the artist's role in society engendered.

The key to Borel's strategy in *Champavert* is gaining the reader's trust and attention. Borel was briefly the subject of much critical and popular interest. Borel's celebrity made him nearly a household name as far away as Italy.[2] Most readers familiar with the struggles of Romanticism would have been familiar with the character of the *lycanthrope*, the most typical and outrageous expression of the *jeune-France* aesthetic.

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[1] The interest in theories that de-emphasize the personality of the author and move away from interpretations that attempt to reconstruct the intention or the sources of a text in the author's biography is that they focus on writing as a practice or performance and not necessarily as straightforward communication. It is important to keep this in mind with Borel: his stories do not necessarily 'mean', but they certainly 'effect' on numerous levels. His irony leaves the communicative aspect of his fiction ambiguous. But one must be cautious not to keep the author out of the picture when looking at the active relationships that lie between the affective poles of the text (between reader and author). Borel presents his text in a certain manner, and that presentation affects the way it is re-created by the reader. I argue throughout this thesis that it is possible to reconstruct, historically, some of the forces shaping Borel's presentation of his work, his relationship with his readership and his sense of literary ethics. In postmodern studies, most notably those of Jean-Luc Steinmetz, the historical background and intertextuality are largely ignored. Many nuances are missed in his readings, while certain characteristics are inflated to grandiose proportions:

[L'œuvre de Borel] nous force à réfléchir sur les forces agissantes de l'écriture, sur les pouvoirs de la fiction, sur le lieu instable ou divisé qu'occupe celui qui écrit. Au moment même où Borel affirme son moi, il va le désigner comme l'endroit d'un partage; et il en manifeste l'envers, la doublure, au point de perturber de manière inaugurale la posture du moi dans la littérature. Si Hugo se réfère toujours à un *Ego Scriptor*, Borel, par excès d'égotisme, se transforme et se divise sous les yeux du lecteur. (Steinmetz, Jean-Luc, 'L'Ouïe du nom', in *Littérature*, 33, 1979, p. 87).

Borel is certainly not the first to disturb the 'I' in literature, nor is he the most important author to play with this concept during his epoch. Nevertheless, we shall see that his irony, which Steinmetz is unable to re-create or explore in its dynamism, had a significant resonance through the course of the century.

[2] Gérard de Nerval writes to Eugène Renduel in late 1834 or early 1835, 'Si vous voyez Pétrus et Théophile, dites-leur qu'on les lit dans tous les cabinets de lecture d'Italie.' (de Nerval, Gérard, *Œuvres complètes*, vol. I, p. 1298.)

Whether or not the average reader would have been gullible enough to believe Borel's pseudonymy and whether any reader would fail to perceive the prevalent irony in his work is of little account. Both gullible and more sophisticated readers would certainly be at risk of taking the bait. The popularity of the *jeune-France* and *bousingo* caricatures assured that nearly anyone could have succumbed to the appeal of the work, the preface serving a similar function to the blaring headlines of a tabloid newspaper scandal.

From the outset, the narrator's motive is to mislead the reader. This intention relies on the fact that the movement through which Borel, the narrator, guides the reader in many of the stories anticipates, in its trajectory, a certain outcome; and this expectation is often deceived. The entire premise of narrative lies in the anticipation of structure, the consciousness imparted at each stage of the reading of the other, contiguous stages: remembrance and re-structuring of what preceded, and anticipation and pre-structuring of what is to come. Under these conditions, the faith of the reader must lie in the author's capacity to form a coherent, metaphoric whole from the narrative parts. Tzvetan Todorov emphasizes the importance not only of the metonymic contiguity of narrative structure (an aspect commonly scrutinized in semiotic and structuralist critiques), but of the metaphoricity required in narrative for its proper recognition as a whole by the reader.[3] In simple terms, the author must gain the reader's trust. Borel's irony lies partially in the stretching and manipulation of the metaphoric aspect of his narratives. He is able to maintain the reader's trust in his skill as a storyteller, and in the value of his fiction. Yet the final effect of his work upon the reader is often a feeling of disillusionment that leads to an interrogation by the reading subject of his own judgment of the narrative whole and, finally, of his capacity for judgment. Gary Handwerk, in his work on irony and ethics in

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[3]Todorov, Tzvetan, 'Les transformations narratives' in *Poétique de la prose* (Paris: Seuil, 1971), p. 240. In this chapter, Todorov stresses the importance of both difference and resemblance in the building of narrative. The reader must recognise similarities in narrative elements in order to build a coherent whole. Or, similarly, if the narrative parts are disjointed, he must trust that the author will, at some stage, tie the parts together credibly.

narrative, captures the flexibility that irony lends to an author's combination of narrative elements:

> Even the simplest ironies establish linkages between the most discrete areas of mental activity. Establishing the possibility of such connections is more significant than the particular linkage created, since irony refuses to privilege any one level of analysis or any one juxtaposition. Recognition of incompatibility demands judgment, but the difficulty of definitive assessment forces further probing into the basis of judgment, hence into the structure of identity.[4]

Borel's irony allows him to construct linkages between what would appear 'discrete' elements of narrative, and thus to maintain his reader's attention through an experience whose parts would otherwise appear incongruous. He is thus able to play with his reader's recognition of generic patterns. The literary model that he most often manipulates is that of melodrama. I shall shortly discuss the importance of melodrama in the early nineteenth century and in Borel's work, but for the moment, we must recognise that melodrama implies morality. The characters of melodrama are invariably synonymous with their moral functions. The reader of Borel's epoch, upon recognising elements of melodrama within a work, naturally trusts that the narrative that lies ahead will fall within the normal pattern of the genre. There is an anticipation on the part of the reader of a moralising conclusion to melodramatic narrative. In this sense, melodrama implies an ethics of fiction, not simply concerning the morality expressed through the peripetia, but through the trust the reader places in the author to fulfill the expectations that arise from a recognition of generic patterns.

The ethical challenge of Borel's 'contes immoraux' then works on two levels. The importance of the subtitle of Borel's most significant work must not be ignored. The

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[4]Handwerk, Gary, *Irony and Ethics in Narrative* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), p. 3. Handwerk's observation has one serious drawback. Certain types of irony, 'even the simplest ironies', do indeed privilege one interpretation, or a finite number of interpretations. Some forms of irony are deliberately penetrable. But his observation applies accurately to Romantic Irony, and so furthers my argument.

'contes immoraux' have been misjudged by Borel's most important critics.[5] Borel does not exaggerate the immorality of the tales, as Enid Starkie claims; he deliberately and ironically highlights the *moral* intention of the work through the apparent misnomer. His work is not only an assault upon the conventional morality of his day, filled as it is with attacks upon tyranny, religious intolerance, racism, the cruelty of capital punishment; the work is also an exploration of, and a manipulative performance with, the ethics of literary relationships. This fact appears to have been better understood by those immersed in Borel's epoch:

> Il y a beaucoup d'ironie dans ce livre. C'est par dérision, sans doute, que l'auteur a nommé immoraux ses contes, qui moralisent la société actuelle, dans ses vices et ses crimes; car il n'y a pas ici plus d'adultère et plus de sang qu'ailleurs par la littérature qui court : çà et là sont de bonnes vérités dures à dire et dites avec rudesse, bien saturées d'amertume, et brûlantes comme un fer rouge.[6]

Derision of society both in the form of institutions, and in the form of his reading public. '[Socratic] Irony directs itself not against this or that particular existence, but against the whole given actuality of a certain time and situation'.[7]

The Preface to *Champavert* and the Establishment of a Contract Between Reader and Narrator

The opening paragraph of the preface to *Champavert* brings this problem of literary ethics into stark light. The nameless narrator of the preface begins the work with

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[5]Enid Starkie misses the irony in the work's title: 'In claiming that these tales are immoral, Borel exaggerates. Some are horrifying, some are cynical and cruel, with touches of sadism which was fashionable in that period; they all possess his grim ironical humour–'l'humour noir' as André Breton calls it– but they are not, most of them, particularly immoral; certainly less so than Gautier's *Mademoiselle de Maupin* which was to be published three years later.' (Starkie, Enid, *Pétrus Borel, the Lycanthrope*, pp. 112-3).

[6]Lacroix, Paul, 'Vision par un contemporain de Champavert', *Revue de Paris*, March 1833, p. 146.

[7]Kierkegaard, Søren, *The Concept of Irony*, p. 271.

an engaging contract for the reader. The narrative voice presents itself as an acquaintance of the author who, out of goodwill to the reader, has edited and published his work. The author who went by the name 'Pétrus Borel' was in fact called 'Champavert'. The narrator claims that a sense of duty both to the defunct author and to the reader has led him to publish the work, in order to illuminate the enigmatic and brief career of the celebrated Champavert. The narrator promises to dispel the public's illusions concerning a misunderstood writer. His rhetorical strategy implies an ethical clarity in his relationship with the reader and with the defunct author. His professed purpose is finally to reveal the much abused truth:

> C'est toujours un pénible emploi que celui de *détrompeur*, c'est toujours une pénible corvée que celle de venir enlever au public ses douces erreurs, ses mensonges auxquels il s'est fait, auxquels il a donné sa foi; rien n'est plus dangereux que de faire un vide dans le cœur de l'homme. Jamais je ne me hasarderai à une aussi scabreuse mission [...] Malgré tout cet éloignement, ma religieuse sincérité, aujourd'hui, me fait un devoir de démasquer une supercherie, heureusement sans importance, une pseudonymie.[8]

The task is not without peril, but the narrator highlights his good intentions by underlining the risks that he runs by informing the public of the pseudonymy.

Despite the pretence of goodwill, the narrator displays a duplicity that is similar, though perhaps more sophisticated, than the duplicity of the single narrative voice from the preface of *Rhapsodies*; in the earlier work, Borel cultivates the desire of his reader in a comparable fashion, proposing a valuable experience whose legitimacy is reinforced by a claim to authenticity. And the same movement of simultaneous assertion and retraction is at work in the preface to *Champavert*. The narrator presents himself as sincere and benevolent, but he is not entirely present in what he writes. Similarly, it becomes increasingly difficult to situate the pretended author of the collection, Champavert. The tension of the narrator's duplicity and the author's constant yet indefinable presence at

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[8] Borel, Pétrus, *Champavert*, p. 7

once draws the reader into the work with urgency, while making the author's relation to his text less clear. Borel, the narrator of *Champavert*, promises to reveal some truth concerning the celebrated 'Pétrus Borel' the *lycanthrope*, dividing his controversial personality and obscuring the divisions and connections between the ensuing parts. The reader's desire to clarify and to simplifiy this proliferation of authorship grows with the intensity of his participation in the textual experience.

The ethical contract between both reader and author is skilfully exploited. Borel alludes to the trusting and amicable relationship between the reader and author, who, through ostensible selflessness, devotes himself to the truthful exploration of the troubled psyche of a great artist:

> On aime bien l'écrivain qui se complaît à étaler comme des tapisseries l'existence, souvent très occulte, des hommes qui nous sont chers.[9]

This statement characterises the friendship and *trust* that Borel imposes upon his reader through its invocation. He says in essence, 'You *do* like an author who reveals the dark secrets of a troubled, artistic soul,' and by implication, 'You like and trust me (the narrator).' Simultaneously, Borel, the narrator, characterises the relationship between the reader and this particular type of text (*viz.*, titillating, literary biography) as of the highest virtue. The reader's desire to experience the work is given impetus by the fundamental pleasure of posthumous voyeurism:

> Il n'est pas de plus doux plaisir que celui de descendre dans l'intimité d'un être sensible, c'est-à-dire supérieur, qui s'est éteint; c'est une indiscrétion bien louable que celle de vouloir s'initier au secret de la vie d'un grand artiste ou d'un malheureux.[10]

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[9] Ibid., p. 9.

[10] Ibid.

The indiscretion of voyeurism becomes a creditable pursuit, particularly when it holds the promise of the understanding of a complex, subtle and troubled mind.

The narrator heightens the pleasure of voyeurism by describing the difficulty with which the work was made available.

> Ses derniers compagnons, dont les noms sont cités dans les *Rhapsodies*, qui l'ont connu dans la plus grande intimité, auraient pu donner sur lui des renseignements exacts et positifs; mais, comme il n'approuva pas cette publication, ils nous ont fermé leurs portes.[11]

What trauma has left Champavert's companions so acutely suspicious of would-be biographers? Their reluctance can only sharpen the reader's curiosity. The pleasure is greater when the work is forbidden.

Similarly, Borel the narrator here exaggerates the scandal surrounding the publication of *Rhapsodies*. One can presume that he hoped further to heighten the sense of mystery and turmoil surrounding the facts of Champavert's life.

> Ce fut vers la fin de 1831 que parurent les essais poétiques de Champavert, sous le titre de *Rhapsodies, par Pétrus Borel*. Jamais petit livre n'avait fait plus grand scandale, du reste, scandale que fera toujours toute œuvre écrite avec l'âme et le cœur, sans politesse pour un temps où l'on fait de l'art et de la passion avec la tête et la main, et en se battant les flancs à tant la page.

Borel clearly exaggerates the impact of his poetry. As I shall discuss in the context of later criticism of *Champavert*, the greatest amount of critical attention was paid to the extra-literary antics of Borel and his group, and what was printed about *Rhapsodies* involved more critique of Borel's truculent literary persona than it did of the poems themselves. Borel's comments concerning the lack of regard of his epoch for passionate art comprise an attack on classicism ('où l'on fait de l'art et de la passion avec la tête et la main') and on the new literary professionalism ('en se battant les flancs à tant la page').

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[11]Borel, Pétrus, *Champavert*, p. 15.

Borel certainly wanted to draw attention to his work through his provocative demeanour, but then decried the shallowness of professional literary critics when they could not look past the scandal.

> Son allure indépendante, son amour violent de la liberté, l'avaient fait désigner comme républicain redoubtable. Il crut devoir répondre à cette accusation dans la préface de ses *Rhapsodies* [...]
>
> De là, les journaux appelèrent ces vers lycanthropiques, lui lycanthrope, et son inclination d'esprit lycanthropisme [...]
>
> Au milieu de toutes ces critiques haineuses qui jonglèrent sur lui, et qui auraient saturé une âme moins abreuvée que la sienne, il ne douta pas un seul instant de sa force [...][12]

The contradictions of his attempts at once to draw attention to his work through his outrageous persona, and yet to fictionalise and splinter that persona while blurring the relation between the outrageous, lycanthropic myth that had grown up around him and the text, posed problems that only irony could transcend.

Despite his celebrity, Borel acts unsympathetically toward the general misunderstanding surrounding the identities of himself and his literary comrades. His hesitation at correcting the public's 'sweet errors' is thinly veiled sarcasm. The source of this sarcasm stems from an ambivalent, yet on the surface fierce, desire to clear his name of the ridicule and scandal surrounding the *bousingo* and *jeune-France* caricatures:

> [Champavert] fut même regardé par beaucoup comme le grand prêtre de cette camaraderie du bousingo, dont on fit grand scandale, et dont on a par méchanceté et par ignorance perverti les intentions et le titre. Mais n'anticipons pas. Champavert, dans un ouvrage collectif qui doit incessament paraître, a rétabli la véracité des faits, et éclairé le public que les journaux ont abusé.[13]

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[12] Borel, Pétrus, *Champavert*, p. 23.

[13] Ibid., pp. 14-15. The work to which Borel refers is also mentioned by O'Neddy in his letter to Asselineau (see above, Ch. 1, note 43).

A number of the unfulfilled *jeune-France* projects grew from the desire to respond to popular caricature. The 'ouvrage collectif' doubtless refers to *Les Contes du bousingo*; Gautier's *Les Jeunes France* was quite likely the continuation of this project.

The narrator recounts, in Champavert's own words, his suspicion regarding the intentions of anyone outside his circle of literary comrades. This is an apparent response to the defunct author's sense of persecution. Champavert anticipates malevolence in every stranger:

> [...] je répugne à donner des poignées de main à d'autres qu'à des intimes; je frissonne involontairement à cette idée qui ne manque jamais de m'assaillir, que je presse peut-être une main infidèle, traîtresse, parricide![14]

He is highly suspicious of his reader, yet the shocking nature of Champavert's confessions reveals a high degree of intimacy. Why would he feel himself driven to recount such dark and misanthropic secrets to a reader whom he hates unconditionally? He loathes the unfamiliar reader, yet he needs him as an audience. Without him, his literary voice does not exist.

The fragmentation of Borel's authorial persona, and his elusiveness come directly from the dual and self-contradictory impulses that Borel exhibits toward his public and toward his own texts. Borel, the narrator of the preface, quite abruptly severs himself from the authorial persona that had been appropriated within the critical press. Pétrus Borel, the narrator, kills 'Pétrus Borel', the *rhapsode*, the lycanthrope:

> Pétrus Borel, le *rhapsode*, le *lycanthrope*, s'est tué, ou pour dire la vérité que nous avons promise, le pauvre jeune homme qui se recélait sous ce sobriquet, qu'il s'était donné à peine au sortir de l'enfance; aussi peu de ses camarades connurent-t-ils son véritable nom; aucun ne sut jamais la cause de ce travestissement; le fit-il par nécessité ou par bizarrerie? c'est-ce qu'on ignore entièrement.[15]

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[14] Ibid., p. 31.

[15] Ibid., p. 8

The narrator's feigned ignorance of the origins of Borel's *sobriquet* belie his attempts to mask his own relation to the persona. Borel, the narrator, carefully obscures any concrete link that might lead to the connection of biographical data with the fictional narrator or with the celebrated literary *provocateur*.

In the preface, Borel as narrator not only multiplies and obscures the personality of Borel the artist, but also presents contradictory evidence of the means to understand the personalities and the relationships that he pretends to illuminate. Will we find the dark secret that holds the key to Champavert's suicide in the stories? The preface leaves more questions than it answers. Following the narrator's presentation of his intentions, a number of fictional anecdotes and literary fragments concerning Champavert are offered, but these serve only to draw the reader in deeper, and offer no real clue to Champavert's anguish or his reasons for suicide. Borel makes reference to certain biographical keys that he suggests might enhance our understanding of the work. Borel, the narrator, actually entices the reader into trying to understand the work through the sparse anecdotes that he provides. The narrator suggests that one might find some clue to his suicide and to the 'bizarrerie' of his fiction. The connection between biography and text is promoted with an apparent but superficial vigour. Borel states that there exists an explicit relationship between the troubled life of Champavert and his literature. With regards to *Rhapsodies*, he writes:

> c'est un livret [*Rhapsodies*] emprégné [sic] de fiel et de douleur, c'est le prélude du drame qui le suivit, et que les plus simples avaient pressenti; une œuvre comme celle-là n'a pas de second tome: son épilogue, c'est la mort.[16]

Nevertheless, the lack of anecdotal and biographical material leaves speculation on his motives uncertain:

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[16]Ibid., p. 15.

> Champavert était peu parleur de lui-même; il tombait généralement dans le monde comme une apparition, sans antécédens connus, sans avenir présumé.[17]

Yet the narrator undertakes such speculation in apparent disregard of the risks that he suggests. Understanding the fiction of the pseudonymy, and knowing the contentious past of Borel's relationship with the literary press and with the middle-class reading public, the critic must assume that Borel attempts further to cloud the reader's judgment. Borel the narrator places the biographical titbits as bait, at once enhancing the apparent 'realism' of the context of Champavert/Borel's suicide and thus giving an urgency to the reader's desire to experience the stories and presumably to achieve a better understanding of the enigma of the author's troubled life and death.

In addition to the previous metaphors concerning the mystery of Champavert's existence, Borel adds the following:

> Le cours de sa brève carrière fut semblable au cours de ces torrens dont on ignore la source, qui tantôt inondent les vallées, et tantôt coulent souterrainement.[18]

Despite this concerted aura of mystery, Borel leaves a trail of contiguous but often misleading clues concerning the supposed author's personality, and the fashion in which it was shaped by his life and his genius:

> Déjà en ce temps, il portait en lui une tristesse, un chagrin indéfini, vague et profond, la mélancholie était déjà son *idiosyncrasie*. De ses anciens condisciples se rappellent l'avoir vu passer très souvent des jours entiers à verser des larmes amèrement, sans causes connues ou apparentes, lui-même plus tard n'a jamais pu définir ces désolations. Assurément la vie en communauté forcée l'avait jeté dans cet état de souffrance, et cette souffrance, cet ennui exaltaient ses organes sensitifs et aiguillonnaient sa chagrine irritabilité.[19]

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[17] Ibid., p. 9.

[18] Ibid., p. 12.

[19] Ibid.

Borel describes, from a comfortable distance, the enigmatic and volatile emotional side of his literary persona. While divorcing himself of responsibility for the truculence of Borel/Champavert, he creates a legitimacy surrounding the apparent misanthropy of the *lycanthrope* by attributing his irritability to some inalienable element of his personality, evident from earliest childhood. Similarly, the narrator attributes his anticlericalism to childhood experience:

> On a encore quelques soupçons vagues que son instruction avait été confiée à des prêtres, son irréligion viendrait assez à l'appui de cette opinion.[20]

His suspicion of religion is not a rational position, for which he may be held accountable, but is instead a reaction to the implied abuses that he suffered as a boy. Borel the narrator thus hints at the correlation between Champavert's melancholy, his upbringing and the heightened sensitivity that fed his artistic talent, but gives very little in the way of concrete evidence. As I shall suggest shortly, Borel plays with the paradigm of Romantic art criticism, in which the work of art may be understood as an extension of the artist's biography, and may be interpreted through a knowledge of his life.

Reading these excerpts with an understanding of Borel's duplicitous presentation of biographical information, one can interpret something other than the recounting of a troubled existence and an inevitable suicide. If we consider the fictional personae, the *jeune-France*, the *bousingo* and the *lycanthrope*, from their debuts in the literary press, and the manner by which Borel employed metaphors for death in *Rhapsodies*, we find that the story of Champavert's death is a more appropriate metaphor for the drama of Borel's literary career. Borel felt that the caricatural personalities that had surrounded him had suffered enough turmoil and distortion. Mutated and torn by the pressures of the conflicting intentions of Borel and the critical press, they were incompatible with his sense of artistic integrity. He employed the metaphor of death as an irrevocable moral

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[20] Ibid., p. 11

arbitration, much as he had done to visit punishment on the reader in *Rhapsodies*. As in Borel's poetry, scenes of death in his short stories play pivotal roles in the ethical critique that his fiction achieves. The moment of death, and the often terse narrative following the death scene involve an abrupt shift in the ethical dimension of many of the stories; the shift is brought about by literary techniques that involve a de-dramatisation of the narrative and, occasionally, a blurring or shifting of narrative perspective. The indirect source of these literary techniques is Borel's speculation on his place in society as an artist. The narrative dynamics of the story re-create the drama of Borel's literary career.

Similarities exist between Borel's preface, Sainte-Beuve's *Vie, pensées et poésies de Joseph Delorme*, and Lassailly's *Les Roueries de Trialph.*[21] All were written within the space of four years. Borel and Sainte-Beuve incorporate pseudonymy to present the work of an ostensibly dead author whose troubled life holds the tantalising key to his work's meaning. Lassailly's work shortly followed the publication of *Champavert*, and he was undoubtedly inspired by Borel. Borel and Lassailly incorporate suicide and irony into a species of literary trap for their readers, employing enticing rhetoric and cultivating the reader's desire while masking the outrageous plot twists that will shock and offend that reader.

A discussion of Lassailly is more appropriate at a later stage of this study, where we shall examine the narrative structure of Borel's short stories, which, along with the suicide motif, appear to have exercised the heaviest influence on Lassailly; meanwhile, we can say that the influence of Sainte-Beuve bears mainly on Borel's preface. *Joseph Delorme* appeared in 1829 and was widely read. The style and premise of its preface foreshadow much in *Champavert*. Other authors sharing in the same very specific cultural ambiance as Borel cite Sainte-Beuve's work as a seminal influence. *Joseph*

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[21]Ch. Augustin Sainte-Beuve, *Vie, poésies et pensées de Joseph Delorme* (Paris: Nouvelles Editions Latines, 1956). Lassailly, Charles, *Les Roueries de Trialph, notre contemporain avant son suicide* (Geneva: Slatkine Reprints, 1973).

Delorme was credited by Baudelaire as being *'Les Fleurs du Mal* de la veille',[22] and Gautier wrote 'Oncle Beuve, ton *Joseph Delorme* m'a beaucoup servi pour mes vers'.[23] Sainte-Beuve's influence was preponderant among those of Borel's circle, and among those who would emulate him.

Unlike Borel, Sainte-Beuve's work is congruent with an earlier Romanticism. In this sense, the contrasts between Borel and Sainte-Beuve reveal what is innovative in Borel. The preface of *Joseph Delorme* offers a nearly complete psychological portrait of the young man behind the poems, recounting in detail the turbulent sexuality of his adolescence, his crises of faith in religion, his sense of loneliness and his frequent communion with nature. The preface recounts the troubled and untypical life of a young Romantic who, despite his superior faculties, succumbs to the seduction of a life of letters, falls prey to emotional turbulence and aggravated narcissism, and dies of 'phthisie pulmonaire' and a broken heart at the age of twenty. Sainte-Beuve's narrative preface is complete on its own, and serves to complement the poetry and perhaps to portray in a contemporary and Romantic light poetry that was rather old-fashioned at the time of publishing. A very different ethical contract is understood in this work from that in *Champavert*. Sainte-Beuve presents a complete portrait of his fictional subject, which serves to fill the gaps left by the sparsity of the poetic and philosophical fragments to follow. The literary morsels thus add detail and depth to an already full narrative stucture: the character/author's life.

Sainte-Beuve's preface infers a critical paradigm. Emphasis does not fall upon the relationship between text and reader through the act of reading, as happens through the rhetorical strategies in Borel's preface. Sainte-Beuve's text presents a whole and clear portrait of the young Delorme's life, moving from one explicit psychological trait to the

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[22] Antoine, Gérald, 'Histoire du texte' in Ch. Augustin Sainte-Beuve, *Vie, poésies et pensées de Joseph Delorme*, p. CVIII.

[23] Ibid., p. CVII.

next, anticipated in the interior dramas of the subject's life. There is little duplicity or deferral of meaning except in the anticipation of the detail that the poetic and philosophical fragments will provide. Similarly, there is little obscurity in the manner through which these details are presented to the reader. The interaction of reader and text does not bear the self-conscious peril that characterises Borel, and thus the relationship between author and reader is more straightforward, and less a subject of manipulation.

This clarity indicates that Sainte-Beuve's main focus is the relationship between the author and his work. In contrast to Borel, *Joseph Delorme* stands as a metaphor for Romantic art criticism. The art grows from the artist's life, and conversely, the artist's life and psychological make-up can be used as exegetical keys. The structure of the work represents the reasoning behind this critical example: the author's life is a figurative 'preface' to the work, an anterior state of the dramas to be played out therein.

The Ethical Critique of the Short Stories of Champavert

The short stories of *Champavert* must be understood through the morality to which Borel alludes ironically in the work's subtitle: 'contes immoraux'. The stories themselves are highly moralising, both in their characterisation and in their literary, narrative structure; their irony comes from the disparity between the apparent immorality of the society that Borel depicts and the supposed scrupulousness and truth of his artistic depiction. His stories would be viewed as 'immoral' only by a society whose standards are distorted by rampant immorality. The subtitle reflects upon the nature of the text itself as much as it reflects on the subject matter portrayed therein. It is a reversal that we have seen previously in Borel's characterisation of his political savagery. His truculence, and his anarchic tendencies are apparent reactions to an unjust political situation.

Simultaneously, his declarations of literary and political radicalism are a provocation and a means of engaging the interest of his middle-class targets.

In the discussion of ethics, newly emerging bourgeois values in the early 1830s, the new commercialism in literature, and particularly literary treatment of recent historical and political themes, it would be folly to overlook the impact of melodramatic theatre. From the first plays of Pixerécourt at the turn of the eighteenth century through the 1830s, theatrical melodrama grew as a genre that enjoyed tremendous popular success across social classes in France. Critics have argued convincingly that melodrama heralded the death of tragedy and facilitated the emergence of the new Romantic theatre.[24] Borel was highly aware of the influence of melodrama, and he used its characters and tropes frequently in his short stories. Borel employed certain tropes of melodrama as a standard from which his own, ironic literature diverged sharply and often unexpectedly. He adopted material from Pixerécourt's *Latude, ou trente-cinq ans de captivité* for his novel *Madame Putiphar*, and Borel's short story, 'Dina la belle juive', borrows extensively from Pixerécourt's *Le Fanal de Messine.*[25] Borel's preoccupation with ethical questions, and his tendency toward exaggeration and polemicising, enhance the representation in his fiction of melodramatic gesture and phrasing. Melodrama is important at this moment in our study because it represents the development of a new morality in literature, the morality of the middle class and the morality of the Revolution of 1789. Nodier comments on Pixerécourt's rapport with his audience, with morality and with history:

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[24] E.g., Brooks, Peter, *The Melodramatic Imagination* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1976) particularly chapters 2 and 4.

[25] Pixerécourt's Le Fanal de Messine provided much of the material for Borel's 'Dina, la belle juive'. The villain of the play, Messine's tutor, is named Aymar, the same as the protagonist of Borel's short story. Messine dies by drowning, in order to escape being raped by her incestuous brothers. The death scene is very similar to the rape and drowning death of Dina. Her lover discovers her body, and commits suicide, just as Aymar shot himself upon seeing the funeral procession for Dina. For more discussion see chapter 4 of this thesis, pp.192-9. Melodramatic theatre exercised its most considerable influence on Borel's novel, *Madame Putiphar*. I shall discuss Borel and Pixerécourt in depth in the following chapter, when treating the novel.

> Il fallait leur [le public] rappeler dans un thème toujours nouveaux de contexture, toujours uniforme de résultats, cette grande leçon dans laquelle se résument toutes les philosophies, appuyées sur toute les religions: que même ici bas, la vertu n'est jamais sans récompense, le crime n'est jamais sans châtiments. Et qu'on n'aille pas s'y tromper! ce n'était pas peu de chose que le mélodrame! c'est la moralité de la révolution.[26]

There is a simple, intradiegetic, ethical paradigm in melodrama. The principal characters tend to be synomymous with their moral functions. In addition, the unspoken contract between author and spectator or reader is straightforward. Through various, formulaic peripetia, the forces of good overcome the forces of evil. The audience can thus rest confident through the experience of the work that a moral conclusion will be achieved, regardless of the injustices portrayed; a cherished set of values will be re-affirmed. Borel exploits the sort of trust between reader and author that would normally accompany melodramatic structures and thematics. Like the characters of melodrama, most of Borel's characters lack psychological depth, and the injustices to which they fall prey beg a moralising conclusion. As we shall see, Borel frequently invokes the reader's sense of justice, or an avenging deity, to put right the horrors to which he subjects his characters. Borel's relationship with melodrama is similar to his relationship with the rhetoric of political engagement. He employs the outward semblance of a political or literary position to engage his reader and to attract the success of scandal to his work while misleading and outraging his reader. His literary or political expressions do not express a concrete ethic, as the force of his polemics, or the tropes of his prose, would imply.

The stories themselves appear to address the problems of political injustice and immorality by employing the literary strategies outlined in the study of the preface. As in Borel's previous work, the motif of death recurs in graphic, physical terms; the moment of death serves as the crux of a moral argument reflected in both the literary subject matter and in the rhetorical and narrative structure. The moment of death, and often the

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[26] 'Introduction' by Charles Nodier, in de Pixerécourt, Guilbert, *Théâtre choisi* 14 vols. (Nancy: Raybois et Cie., 1841), vol. I, p. VIII.

narrative following the death scene comport an abrupt shift in the ethical dimension of most of the stories of *Champavert*. He employs the fictional voice of Champavert to present a characterisation of mortality that we have seen at work in the dark cynicism of the ethical critique of the poetry of *Rhapsodies*:

> C'est par l,cheté que les hommes se reculent devant l'anéantissement: ils se façonnent à leur guise une vie future, se bercent et s'enivrent de ce mensonge qu'ils se sont fait à eux-mêmes [...]
>
> Eh bien! non! idiots que vous êtes! vous allez où vont toutes choses, au néant!... Et c'est face à face avec la mort, le pied dans la fosse que je vous dis cela![27]

In order better to shock and challenge his reader, Borel employs a number of literary techniques that will come to play an important role in later literature: free indirect style; the blurring and subtle shifting of narrative perspective; a diffuse focus upon physical detail or peripheral action during moments of anticipated climax are all elements that compose what I will propose to be an irony inherent to Borel's narrative technique that intensifies the pathos, horror and black humour of his short fiction.

The Structure of the Short Stories, the Narrative Contract and Melodrama

All of the short stories in the collection adopt a structure that conceals crucial elements until the very end, giving the reader the impression that the story is leading him in a direction largely different from that in which he finds himself thrust by each story's conclusion. One could approximate the sting-in-tail ending of many of the stories to the punchline of a disturbing joke. Nevertheless, the stories do not entirely resemble jokes in their structure. Freud first considered the significance of the structure of the joke for the unconscious mind and its grasp of language.[28] Borel's stories employ a similar pattern,

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[27]Ibid., p. 380.

[28]Freud, Sigmund, *Art and Literature*, (London: Penguin Freud Library, 1985), vol. XIV.

but differ from most humour in that the final element which releases the tension built up during the story never complements the apparent development of the story prior to the punchline. Borel's punchlines nearly always lead the reader dramatically to re-structure his view of the important elements of the story in hindsight. Elements that were considered important over the course of the story become insignificant with the final revelation. The mounting tension of the drama is released suddenly without a contiguous and alternative interpretation being readily apparent. In a sense, the drama suddenly loses its energy and the impression of bewilderment and pathos grows overwhelming. The final impression is one of gruesome anticlimax, exacerbated by the graphic imagery of violence and cruelty. Gabriel Laviron, a critic of the epoch, described the effect of Borel's irony in more creative terms:

> [...] il arrivera que chacun, en sortant de le lire [*Champavert*], se mettra deux balles dans le cerveau comme a fait l'auteur; ou bien plutôt que chacun poursuivra sa vie lâchement, mais, comme un malade désespéré, n'acceptera plus de telles potions, et se résignera à quelque régime dulcifiant et délayant.[29]

In humour, the release of laughter is often triggered by the absurdity apparent in the gap between what was perceived and what the punchline reveals to be true. In Borel's work, the punchline universally leaves the reader with greater confusion, a sense of inadequacy or revulsion, before the new meaning that is thus revealed. A more detailed example of the working of this sort of structure in narrative can be found in Peter Brooks's *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative.*[30] In his book the analysis of the 'narrative de-dramatisation' that resembles Borel's sting-in-the-tail endings is applied to work by Flaubert. As we shall see in the final chapter of this thesis, Flaubert made extensive use of images and techniques employed by Borel, particularly in

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[29] Laviron, Gabriel, 'Champavert, contes immoraux, par Pétrus Borel, le lycanthrope' in *L'Artiste*, vol. V, 4 (1833), p. 67.

[30]Brooks, Peter, *Reading for the Plot, Design and Intention in Narrative* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984).

Flaubert's juvenilia. Borel's technique of disappointing those expectations of his reader that had been carefully nurtured by conventional literary or melodramatic patterns will be influential on the prose work of later authors.

'Monsieur de l'Argentière, l'accusateur'

There are a number of processes through which Borel passes on to the reader the sort of disillusionment that led to Champavert's 'suicide'. One of the most typical and innovative is found in the story 'Monsieur de l'Argentière, l'accusateur'. The story follows Bertholin, a prefect; de l'Argentière, a villainous public prosecutor; and Apolline, a destitute young woman whom Bertholin saves from ruin, and who becomes his fiançée. Bertholin is called to the countryside on an extended business trip. During his absence, de l'Argentière visits Apolline in the night and rapes her. When Bertholin returns to Paris, Apolline is visibly pregnant with de l'Argentière's child. In a fit of rage, he throws her into the street. The following narrative comprises some typically Borelian elements. Apolline, homeless and weakened by pregnancy, goes slowly insane from grief and starvation. She gives birth to the child, but is unable to feed it. In a fit of madness, she leaves it in the sewer. She is arrested and, after a brief recovery in la Bourbe, she is prosecuted for infanticide. The public prosecutor who tries the case is de l'Argentière himself. He approaches the job with uncommon zeal. Apolline is condemned to death. The priest who visits her cell on the morning of her execution is overcome with grief upon hearing her story, and can find no words of solace. Apolline is driven to the guillotine in a cart, and, to the delight and astonishment of the public, is executed. The story ends abruptly, and the moralising conclusion that one would have anticipated, given the unlikely concatenation of injustices, never appears.

The structure of the story is typical, and a symbol of the artistic model upon which Borel relies is evident in the first scene. Not only does 'Monsieur de l'Argentière, l'accusateur' gives a foretaste of the baroque and shadowy ambiance of the fiction to come, but it presents a short, if pedantic analysis, of the contrasts between classic and rococo art. There is something in the focus on the organicism of the rococo that foreshadows Borel's narrative style. The opening scene, a dinner between Bertholin and de l'Argentière, takes place in an eighteenth century parlour, sparsely illuminated by candlelight. The moment is an opportunity for Borel to launch a gratuitous critique of classicism. One should recall that he was an architect by trade before becoming a writer:

> Une seule bougie placée sur une petite table éclairait faiblement une salle vaste et haute [...]En fouillant avec soin dans ce clair-obscur, comme on fouille du regard dans les eaux-fortes de Rembrandt, on déchiffrait la décoration d'une salle à manger de l'époque caractéristique de Louis XV, que les classiques inepto-romains appellent malicieusement Roccoco.[31]

The correlation between visual, literary and plastic arts is typically Romantic. But the rococo model gives a glimpse of the aesthetic sympathy Borel feels for the eighteenth century, much like Baudelaire, who was among the first in the nineteenth century to attempt a revival of Watteau. Borel contrasts the fluidity and organicism of the rococo with the strict metonymy of the Classical; each element of the classical speaks of an arrangement or utility within a pre-conceived order. The stress is upon the functionality of the Classical design that has lost its purpose in contemporary France:

> Il est vrai que la corniche encadrant le plafond était nervée et profilée en bandeau et à gorge, sans la moindre parenté avec l'entablement de l'Eresichtœum, du temple d'Antoninus et Faustina ou de l'arc de Drusus; il est vrai qu'elle était sans saillie, larmier, coupe-larme et mouchette chassant et rejettant la pluie qui ne pleut pas. Il est vrai que les arcades n'avaient point en hauteur leur largeur deux fois et demie. Il est vrai qu'on n'avait eu aucun égard aux spirituels modules de l'*illustrissimo signor Jacopo Barrozio da Vignola*, at qu'on avait ri au nez des cinq-ordres.[32]

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[31]Borel, Pétrus, *Champavert*, p. 41.

[32]Ibid., p. 42.

Borel's self-conscious erudition is on display here, and there is a sense that he needs to bombard his reader with examples.

In counterpoint to the classical style, the elements of baroque or rococo art and candlelight serve well as a metaphor for Borel's fiction. The 'clair-obscur' of the candlelight is the author's flickering and uncertain illumination of the subject of his work. The shape that it takes, the filigrees and caprices of the rococo, contrast with the classical elements in that they do not, in their individuality, point as clearly to their artistic school and its precepts. Borel stresses the contiguity of the classical style in his enumeration of architectural features, and the classical examples that they recall. His final stress upon the 'cinq-ordres' sums up the coherence and metonymy that Classicism represents. In contrast, Borel's prose style, like the rococo flourishes that he admires, is circuitous, organic and misleading; it gives a less clear indication of the overall 'meaning' of the work, only revealing its coherence when viewed in its entirety. There is certainly a relation to this view of literary art and the 'sentimental' school of literature that was popularised in the late eighteenth century with the great number of translations of certain English authors like Richardson and particularly Laurence Sterne.[33] The circuitous journey that relies for its overarching metaphor on some hidden and systematically uncovered, sentimental characteristic of the author, initiated a re-evaluation of classical literary genres.

'Monsieur de l'Argentière' opens, then, with the rococo decor and a dinner scene between the two characters. There is much symbolism, both political and philosophical in the descriptions of the two. A concentration on the symbolism of physical detail foreshadows the later ideas of Balzac:

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[33] The debate on Sterne, and on 'sentimental' literature developed ideas that would become the foundation for much Romantic literature. *Vie et opinions de Tristram Shandy* was first translated in 1776 by Frenais and was re-edited half a dozen times before the turn of the nineteenth century.

> Le plus jeune tenait baissée une figure blème, sur laquelle pleuvaient des cheveux roux; ses yeux étaient caverneux et faux, son nez long et en fer de lance; vous dire que ses favoris étaient taillés carrément sur ses joues comme des sous-pieds, c'est vous dire que la scène se passait sous l'empire, aux abords de 1810.
>
> Le plus âgé, trapu, était le prototype des Francs-Comtois de la plaine; sa chevelure, moisson épaisse, était suspendue, comme les jardins de Babylone, sur sa face large et plate en oiseau de nuit.
>
> Ils étaient goulument penchés sur la table, semblant deux loups se disputant une carcasse; mais leurs interlocutions sourdes et brouillées par la sonorité de la salle contrefaisaient les grognemens d'un porc.
>
> L'un était moins qu'un loup, c'était un accusateur public. L'autre plus qu'un porc, c'était un préfet.[34]

Typically of Borel, there is little subtlety in the allegory.

The following dialogue focusses upon Betholin's protection and care of Apolline. He recounts her kindness and beauty, her noble origins, and shares with de l'Argentière his intention to marry her once he returns from his job in the provinces. De l'Argentière asks a long series of probing questions; it becomes quickly clear that he is a predatory and aggressive figure whose energies are directed toward provoking guilt and complicity in those around him. He personifies his profession in the worst possible way. Borel quite likely borrows his image of the public prosecutor from the second edition of Hugo's, *Le Dernier jour d'un condamné.*

> Il est difficile de songer de sang-froid à ce qu'est un procureur royal criminel. C'est un homme qui gagne sa vie à envoyer des autres à l'échafaud. C'est le pourvoyeur titulaire des places de Grève. Du reste, c'est un monsieur qui a des prétentions au style et aux lettres, qui est beau parleur ou croit l'être, qui récite au besoin un vers latin ou deux avant de conclure à la mort [...]'[35]

After the scene of her rape, Apolline becomes temporarily deranged through hunger and depression. During the following gruesome series of events, one must consider Baudelaire's characterisation of Borel's 'guignon'. Borel himself was fixated by

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[34]Ibid., p. 44.

[35]Hugo, Victor, *Le Dernier jour d'un condamné* (Bruxelles: Laurent, 1835), pp. 35-6.

characters living under a fatal destiny. In a short description of Apolline's descent into madness, we find a foretaste of Baudelaire's satanism:

> Elle, quelques mois plus tôt, si belle encore, amaigrie, phtisique, comme un spectre, ne sortait qu'à la nuit noire pour éviter les regards méchans.
>
> Le voisinage l'aurait crue morte, si, de temps en temps, elle n'avait touché un piano délabré et servant de table, triste ruine de son ancienne opulence. On avait même remarqué et retenu cette strophe que souvent elle psalmodiait langoureusement, et qu'elle semblait affectionner par-dessus toutes.
>
> Bourreaux, arrêtez ma torture!
> Le mal a fait mon cœur mauvais:
> Haine à toi Dieu, monde, nature,
> Haine à tout ce que je rêvais!...
> Avant mon corps, sur cette roue
> Où le sort le tient garotté,
> Mon âme expire, et je la voue
> A Satan, pour l'éternité!...[36]

Borel identifies strongly with the pariah; his apparent anarchism and savagery both elicit his alienation and are responses to his sense that those around him miscomprehend and undervalue his work. Borel appears aware of an inevitable progression, where the symptoms of his alienation work further to aggravate its causes.

Until the scene in which Apolline abandons her child, the structures and thematics of theatrical melodrama are in place. Persecuted innocence is a staple motif, but more importantly, the device of the mother losing her infant provided the emotional 'hook' to numerous melodramatic plot twists:

> De Fauchon la vielleuse à Jean Fortier se dessine tout au long du XIXe siècle un portrait de femme exemplaire subissant avec tous les courages outrages et avanies. L'héroine de mélodrame est épouse mais surtout mère que l'on sépare de ses enfants.[37]

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[36]Borel, Pétrus, *Champavert*, p. 70.

[37]Thomasseau, Jean-Marie, *Le Mélodrame* (Paris: PUF, 1984), p. 35.

The reader would naturally expect an outcome in which the virtuous would be absolved and the guilty punished according to the formulae active in so many hundreds of melodramatic theatrical and literary products of the epoch.

The following chapter, ironically entitled 'Very Wel' [sic], begins with a sudden shift in narrative perspective. The dramatic moments of the story have until this point been largely related through direct discourse; the dialogue and interaction of the protagonists were described without an intermediary. Suddenly, in a foretaste of the de-dramatising effect of the final scenes of the narrative, the perspective draws back and widens. There is an effect similar to dilution or filtering. The events following the arrest are related through the popular press and through the gossip of the bourgeoisie. The urgency and suspense are partially dissipated, but a feeling of pathos lingers:

> Le lendemain, dans tout Paris, il n'était question que d'un enfant jeté dans un égout, et les crieurs publics s'en allaient processionnellement par la ville, hurlant et vendant pour un sou le détail exact de l'horrible infanticide commis, au faubourg Saint-Germain, par une fille de grande maison.
>
> Cet événement avait jeté l'effroi parmi la bourgeoisie, qui brûlait déjà de voir l'affaire à la cour d'assises, pour la connaître tout à fond; et qui, rancunière, jouissait, par avance, du spectacle rare d'une fille noble sur la sellette et l'échafaud.[38]

There is more than a hint in this short tale of the animosity that exists, in Borel's view, between artist and public. The intentions that inform the bourgeoisie's desire to concretise the meaning of Apolline's crime, to see it dissected and explained in the assize courts, reflect the intentions that we saw informing the bourgeois judgment of literary work in the wake of political turmoil. Apolline is an active affront to middle-class morality. According to Borel, despite the mitigating circumstances surrounding Apolline's actions, the bourgeoisie appear ready to rush to a judgment of her affair that will confirm their own prejudices. Their gleeful anticipation of the 'spectacle rare d'une fille noble sur la sellette et l'échafaud' confirms the nature of their interest in the case.

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[38]Borel, *Champavert*, p. 77.

Borel displays a sharp sarcasm when describing the interests of the court magistrates and of the executioner in Apolline's recuperation in the hospital. Their enthusiasm to oversee Apolline's recovery is underwritten by a selfish intention that surpasses even the joyous cruelty of the bourgeoisie:

> A l'hospice, on avait d'abord désespéré des jours d'Apolline, mais on l'entoura de tant de soins, sur la recommandation de Messieurs de la justice, qui redoutaient que la mort ne tranchât la question sans eux et n'empiétât sur leurs droits et sur ceux du bourreau.[39]

Borel's black humour is nowhere better expressed than when it targets the injustices of the court system and the absurdity of capital punishment.

There is a strong connection in all of Borel's work with the perceivedly unjust judgements of a hostile public and the consequent exile or confinement that they provoke. In Borel's fatalistic, literary universe, the possibility of achieving truth or justice is remote. The problem is one of interpretation and conformity; stemming from his literary experiences with journalism and with public misinterpretation of political ideas, Borel's conception of the frequency and the mechanisms of misinterpretation underwrites nearly all of the ethical critiques in his fiction. Human destiny is overseen by the tyranny of an unsympathetic crowd, as in the bloodthirsty, but outwardly polite mob that attends Apolline's execution, or by a cruel and unpredictable deity, 'un ogre appelé Dieu'.[40] Borel portrays culture and society as representing varying degrees of arbitrary constraint, confinement and persecution; the moral inertia of society, and the pressures that it exercises in its efforts to force conformity are an intangible but almost inescapable prison.

The processes of misinterpration are again described through the avidity with which the public welcomes counterfeit portraits of the accused murderess. Upon her

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[39]Ibid., p. 77-8.

[40]Pétrus Borel, *Rhapsodies*, p. 98.

transfer from prison to the assize courts, the public fills the courtroom in great numbers, curious to catch a glimpse of the woman whose beauty had been described in the popular press as matched only by her ferocity.

> Les vitres des marchands d'estampes étaient garnies de prétendus portraits de la belle Apolline, aussi authentiques que ceux d'Héloïse ou de Jeanne d'Arc: l'un rappelait Madame de la Vallière, l'autre Charlotte Corday, l'autre Joséphine, mais le public, qui veut être dupé à tout prix, en était fort satisfait.[41]

Once again, the desire that informs public scrutiny of the events is shown to be incompatible with an accurate interpretation. Similarly, apparently disinterested professional testimony during the trial hits well wide of the mark:

> Sur cinq médecins appelés à constater quel avait pu être son état moral lors de son accouchement, un seul avait affirmé l'aliénation, et quatre l'avaient niée.[42]

The trajectory of the narrative has, until this point, been decidedly and steeply tragic; the sequence of events, though unlikely, has not been entirely incongruous. The reader is well prepared for Apolline's situation to worsen, following the unusual, but believably contiguous series of misfortunes that befall her.

The final two scenes of the story change this. There is a hint of absurdity in the events preceding Apolline's conviction and death. De l'Argentière, the rapist, brings all of his treachery to play in his prosecution of the case:

> Jamais réquisitoire ne fut plus violent et plus inhumain; il n'est rien que M. de l'Argentière ne mît en jeu pour accabler l'accusée. Il poussa sa rage extravagante jusqu'à la comparer à Saturne, qui dévorait ses enfans, et se résuma en demandant sa tête.[43]

The impression of fatality grows ever stronger. De l'Argentière's hatred pours forth in his speech, in a crescendo of invective and violent, graphic description. The narrative gives

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[41]Borel, *Champavert*, p. 79.

[42]Ibid., p. 80.

[43]Ibid.

the impression of moving toward a climax that would match or exceed the emotional fervour of Apolline's suffering and de l'Argentière's harangue. Instead, the tone changes abruptly. The perspective of the narrative shifts again, and this time more abruptly; from the sharp and unsettling rage of the direct discourse of de l'Argentière's speech, Borel moves to an indirect, muted and pathetic monotone.

The final scene describes the day of Apolline's execution. There is no direct discourse from the protagonists. The actions recounted are stark and simple, and the perspective of the narrative lingers upon what one would consider to be extraneous details. The effect is almost of slow motion as Apolline is led through the crowds gathered to watch her execution. Free indirect style is used for the first time in the story, and blurs the distinction between the crowd and the narrator who, in his condition as storyteller, shares the gleeful complicity of the spectators.

> Il semblait que toute la population de Paris s'était encaquée du Palais de la Grève. De haut en bas, les maisons était chargées de spectateurs avides: jamais supplice n'avait attiré plus de monde. –La voilà!– La voilà! répétait-on de rang en rang.
>
> Qu'elle était belle du haut de son tombereau, cette infortunée Apolline! quelle dignité! quelle résignation! Son teint était plus blanc que le peignoir qui l'enveloppait, et sa chevelure plus noire que le prêtre qui pleurait à ses côtés.[44]

Borel employs free indirect style to blur the distinction between the exclamations of the crowd upon seeing Apolline, and the narrator's description.

The preceding narrative, containing elements of melodrama, naturally anticipates a moralising conclusion. The horror and fatality are too much to bear without the promise of a reward and a lesson. Borel's rhetoric is too leading, his declarations too exaggerated; the reader of the early 19th century could only foreseeably fit the narrative experience into a framework with which he was already familiar. A conclusion matching the injustice and horror of the preceding misfortunes, in its force and redemptive value,

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[44]Ibid., p. 82.

would be the natural outcome. A last minute reprieve and a grisly death for de l'Argentière are in order. Instead, the vagueness and the softening, neutral tones of the final scene increase the malaise. At the moment of her execution, the narrative perspective makes another confusing and ironic shift:

> Il se fit alors un brouhaha général et une fluctuation dans la foule. Il pleuvait: –A bas les parapluies, on ne voit pas! criait-on de toutes parts; –à bas les parapluies! répétaient des voix de femmes; –soyez galans, messieurs, on ne voit pas!
>
> Toute la tourbe, le cou tendu, était sur la pointe du pied.
>
> Quand le couteau tomba, il se fit une sourde rumeur; et un Anglais, penché sur une fenêtre qu'il avait louée 500 fr. fort satisfait, cria un long *very wel* [sic] en applaudissant des mains.[45]

Borel often depicts the morality of the mob in the darkest and most cynical terms. The recent history of the Terror certainly informs his ideas on crowd psychology, but his opposition to middle-class customs fuels his animosity. Borel's sarcasm when referring to the manners of his bourgeois spectators (for they *are* bourgeois, as the umbrellas show) reflects his deeply felt mistrust of their morality and intentions.

Borel's earlier use of free indirect style to engender a deliberate confusion of the voices of the crowd of spectators and of the narrator is highly innovative; there is an inherent irony in it that serves Borel's ethical critique, and that is related to the Romantic irony developing over the course of the nineteenth century. In his work *The Free Indirect Mode: Flaubert and the Poetics of Irony*, Vaheed Ramazani theorises the relationship between Romantic irony in literature and free indirect style.[46] The tension of the inherent irony of much free indirect style places profound emphasis on the author's presence.

> The result of the disappearance of the narrator is not the refining away of the artist but a continual reminder of his presence–as if God were omnipresent and invisible, yet one could continually hear Him breathing. The free indirect

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[45]Ibid., p. 83.

[46]Ramazani, Vaheed K., *The Free Indirect Mode: Flaubert and the Poetics of Irony* (Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia, 1988).

> discourse fuses inside and outside, immanence and transcendence, empathy and the 'breathing' that is irony.[47]

The reader's perception shifts, unconsciously and inexorably, between images of the writer and the literary characters as authors of the text. In an identical fashion, the Romantic ironist walks a tightrope between contradictory metaphysical states. This constant fluctuation of perception fits the very definition of Romantic Irony as a position that unites paradoxical perspectives. Free indirect style thus expresses, perhaps more perfectly than other prose techniques, the metaphysical state of irony from which the Romantic suffered.

Despite the fact that he has long been characterised as one of the most extravagant expressions of French Romanticism, Borel represents a vital transition between the perceived impersonality of the 'Realist' author, and the narcissism of the Romantic. Borel's pretensions to sincerity and truthfulness, the detail and 'realism' of his depictions of violence, and the irony of his style, particularly his narrative techniques and occasional use of free indirect style to change abruptly the moral import of his stories, are key elements shared with much 'realist' literature. Borel's irony is the bridge between elements of Romanticism and Realism that would later be so important to the work of Flaubert.

There is a simpler irony inherent to the narrative ethics of a story such as 'Monsieur de l'Argentière' that begins with very clear, purportedly sincere, moral pronouncements made by the narrator, and ends on such an ambiguous and unsettling note. The descriptions of the main characters involve numerous moral observations, most notably the allegorical descriptions of physical features. 'L'un était moins qu'un loup [...] L'autre était plus qu'un porc [...]'[48] Apolline is described in various clichés and

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[47]Ramazani, op. cit., p. 50.

[48]Borel, *Champavert*, p.44.

melodramatic terms: 'la vierge abandonnée', 'la belle enfant'.[49] She had vowed to seek refuge from her suffering in a convent, but Bertholin promised to act as her 'ange gardien'.[50] The images of saintly virtue, unbearable suffering and the paternal grace of Bertholin are laid on thick and fast in the first short chapter of the story. Borel's irony parodies the clichés of a Romanticism of medieval virtues and larger-than-life characters. De l'Argentière is the foil to Bertholin's sentimentality:

> –De plus en plus ridicule; décidément, tu es amoureux!
> –Eh bien, oui! je suis amoureux! et ne rougirai pas d'un amour sage, d'un amour engendré de la pitié, et je bénis le ciel...
> –Ou tu ne bénis rien!...
> –...Qui m'a conservé libre jusqu'à ce jour, afin que je puisse être tutélaire à cette orpheline.
> –Tu as souscrit au Chateaubriand, est-ce pas?[51]

The catalogue of Romantic cliché to which Borel alludes faces sophisticated derision in the work of Flaubert. And, as I shall later suggest, both authors worked as demoralisers. In the words of Flaubert: 'si jamais je prends une part active au monde ce sera comme penseur et comme démoralisateur'.[52] Borel's aim was to 'venir enlever au public ses douces erreurs, ses mensonges auxquels il a donné sa foi [...]'[53]

This is not to suggest that Borel derides all of the excesses of Romanticism, nor that he shares Flaubert's subtleties. Borel fell abruptly out of fashion because he *embodied* the excess and zeal of the *bousingo*. But sentimentality and melodrama in Borel are always employed for their literary, ethical connotations in a larger, ironising strategy. 'De l'Argentière, l'accusateur' serves as the most complete model of this strategy, but to a greater or lesser degree, the effects of a sudden change of narrative tone,

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[49]Ibid., p. 50, ibid., p. 48.

[50]Ibid., p. 50.

[51]Ibid., p. 50.

[52]Flaubert, Gustave, *Correspondance*, 9 vols. (Paris: Conard, 1926) vol. I, p. 41.

[53]Borel, *Champavert*, p. 7.

the violent shifting of narrative perspective, and the use of free indirect style characterise the other stories.

'Jaquez Barraou, le charpentier'

'Jaquez Barraou, le charpentier' is a tale of jealousy and murder in nineteenth-century Cuba. The tale begins with a similarly straightforward, moralising tone to that encountered in 'De l'Argentière'. Borel expands upon his love of exoticism and his professed primitivism with an attack on slavery and colonial tyranny. Jaquez Barraou, a black carpenter in Havana, epitomises the collective obsession with the displaced African slave in French Romantic literature.[54] There is a noble, Rousseauian simplicity that Borel defends against the forces of civilisation that have uprooted him; it is characterised in the strength of Jaquez's nostalgia, despite his inability clearly to express his desire:

> Il eût été difficule de s'expliquer les mouvemens et les brusques soupirs de cet homme; son regard, chagrin et menaçant, qu'il arrêtait tantôt sur la vaste mer des Antilles, dont il semblait mesurer l'étendue, et que tantôt il jetait sur la ville, aurait pu faire penser qu'il était abîmé dans des rêves nostalgiques; que son cœur était meutri par le mal du pays, cet amour violent de la patrie absente que rien ne saurait abattre, qui fait encore trouver des larmes aux vieillards canadiens courbés sous le joug infamant de l'Anglais, rien qu'au seul nom de leur ancienne patrie, et qui leur fait parfois repousser avec dégoût les jeunes enfans de leur race, qui fatiguent leurs oreilles de la rude langue des vainqueurs. Il paraissait toiser la distance de son Afrique à cette rive américaine, et maudire les Européens barbares qui l'y avaient transplanté après l'avoir échangé contre une scie ou un sabre à ses ravisseurs.[55]

The story develops as Jaquez discovers little by little the intentions of his friend, Juan Cazador, to seduce his wife. Jaquez is devoutly religious, and moral to a fault. His piety and his moral stringency are reflected in Borel's description of his physical

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[54]See Hoffman, Léon-François, *Le Nègre romantique* (Paris: Payot, 1973), particularly chapter IV.

[55]Borel, *Champavert*, p. 91.

robustness, his capacity for work and the clean simplicity of his tropical surroundings; there is a certain amount of cliché in this description, but seldom is irony apparent as in the abrupt changes of tone, the evident sarcasm or the black humour of 'De l'Argentière'. The story is shorter than the first, and the plot is simple and without diversion until the very end. Jaquez conspires to trick Juan into revealing his treachery. He invites him to dinner and gives him large amounts to drink, pretending to be drunk himself, but throwing away his alcohol. When Jaquez feigns drunkenness and sleep, Juan tries to seduce his wife. Jaquez leaps to his feet, grabs his gun and pursues Juan into the streets. He wounds him, but Juan escapes. The next day, Jaquez leaves in pursuit of him, finally cornering him in a deserted street in Havana.

The description of the fight to the death between the two men is as savage as anything Borel produced.

> Aussitôt, [Jaquez] lui créve la poitrine, le sang jaillit au loin; Juan pousse un cri et tombe sur un genou, saisissant à la cuisse Barraou qui lui arrache les cheveux, et le frappe, à coups redoublés, dans les reins; d'un coup de revers, il lui étripe le ventre [...]
>
> L'un lève le bras et brise sa lame sur une pierre du mur, l'autre lui cloue la sienne dans la gorge. Sanglans, taillardés, ils jettent des râlemens affreux, et ne semblent plus qu'une masse de sang qui flue et se caille.[56]

They literally tear each other apart. But, at eight o'clock, as the church bell sounds *las oraciones*, both assailants fall to their knees to say their prayers. The description of their exchange of blows is contrasted sharply with their prayers, recited in dialogue. There is perhaps an element of Borel's anticlericalism in the portrait of violence and religion so closely juxtaposed; but more striking is the subservience of both characters to primal, moral imperatives. Without questioning their motives or circumstances, they fight to the death over a drunken indiscretion; similarly, they do not reflect before obeying the call to prayer. Borel demonstrates an ambiguous respect for the uncomplicated moral attitudes,

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[56]Ibid., pp. 109-10

and for the unhesitant savagery and speed, with which the characters fulfill their desires and duties.

At the end of the prayers, the fight continues, and both men die. This portion of the narrative is recounted in the present tense, while the previous action was written in the literary past tenses. The reader is drawn to the action with a similar urgency to that which characterised the final scene of the first story in the collection. While the free indirect style from 'De l'Argentière' blurs the narrative perspective, sowing uncertainty in the reader and leaving him vulnerable to the shocking dénouement, the present tense forces the second narrative abruptly to the foreground and heightens the shock of the final, disillusioning moment:

> Déjà des milliers de moucherons et de scarabées impurs entrent et sortent de leurs narines et de leur bouches, et barbotent dans l'aposthume de leurs plaies.
>
> Vers la nuit, un marchand heurta du pied leurs cadavres et dit: –Ce ne sont que des nègres et passa outre.[57]

In the tropical heat, the bodies of the two combattants are quickly swarming with flies and insects. The main characters become suddenly small players in a larger moral dilemma. They are no longer active participants, but objects, subject immediately to the indignity of physical decomposition. There is a very abrupt shift, similar to that which characterised the narrative 'deadening' at the end of 'De l'Argentière'. The final line brings a new focus to the drama; the angle of view is widened much as in the previously discussed story, to incorporate a new and discomforting perspective. The process is underlined by the sudden shift in the narrative tone; during the fight scene, the violent passion of the antagonists hurried along the principal action. In the space of a sentence, they become deadened objects. Their demise brings with it no liberation or exaltation, and there is no satisfying resolution to their combat. Their characters do not survive

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[57]Ibid., p. 110.

beyond physical life, and the only action remains the busy, chaotic motion of the tropical insect parasites.

The emotions that had pushed the narrative frantically forward vanish abruptly, and the corpses play an unwilling role in a final, concise, moralising narrative encapsulated in the final sentence. The presumably white merchant becomes the new protagonist as death transforms the anticipated stucture and radically diverts the moral 'flow' of the story. The reader had been led through the story with carefully constructed expectations. And once again the reader must confront the task of re-structuring the story's events with a new moral direction in mind, revealed by the sting-in-the-tail ending. The story takes on a sudden and unsettling meaning: the intensity of Jaquez's emotional drama is eclipsed by the passing merchant's racism.

'Dina, la belle juive'

A nearly identical process is at work in the story 'Dina, la belle juive'. The irony of Borel's narrative provides a similar critique to that seen in the previous stories, but with perhaps a more forceful moral indictment. 'Dina la belle juive' expresses, more than 'Jaquez Barraou', Borel's truculent anti-clericalism which he professed in the prefaces both to this work and to *Rhapsodies*.

'Dina, la belle juive' follows the courtship between the noble Aymar, a well-bred gentile, and Dina the Jewess. The story treats some of the prejudices that the two encounter through their union. Small obstacles are overcome in the course of the story, and there is little indication of the extreme and morbid turn that the narrative will take, save in the form of a few authorial asides at the beginning of the story. There is a hint of

morbidity when Borel describes the criminal history of a quayside neighbourhood in Lyon where the story opens:

> De combien de crimes ces pierres ont dû être témoin! que de meurtres ont dû faire tressaillir ces murailles! Enfer! avec quelle aisance on se délivrait d'un ennemi, d'un rival, d'une femme abusée, d'un père vivace, on le poussait du haut de la montée, on ouvrait un châssis, tout était fait...'[58]

But the dramatic aside may be viewed at this point as a rhetorical device of little impact other than to heighten the sense of peril that the two lovers encounter while violating religious taboos in courtship. The narratorial interjections, and the triumph over religious prejudice, lead the reader to believe that, despite the grim atmosphere, the narrative approaches a moral conclusion. The presence of religious and middle-class institutions indicate a melodramatic turn, as do the striking similarities with Pixerécourt's *Le Fanal de Messine*. As the story approaches its conclusion, religious prejudice is overcome, Dina and Aymar resolve the animosity of their prospective in-laws (ironically, Dina's Jewish family warmly accepts Aymar, while the gentile father disinherits his son) and the couple face only the comparatively small obstacle of Aymar's absence on family business to their anticipated union.

To calm her anxiety at Aymar's departure, Dina seeks the solitude of an evening promenade along the banks of the Saône. The narrator intervenes for the first time in many pages at this point in the text. His warning is at once an enticement for the reader/voyeur and an augur of the imminent tragedy:

> [...] elle [Dina] était peu disposée à la société, à la causerie ; pour songer à son aise et voir le ciel comme elle disait, seule, elle s'en fut errer sur les rives de la Saône; imprudente!...[59]

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[58]Ibid., p. 186.

[59]Ibid., p. 241.

Throughout the collection, Borel employs a number of such dramatic, narratorial asides. He frequently addresses the reader, giving vague hints as to the perils his characters will encounter. Again, these are the staples of melodramatic narrative, in which the persecution of virtue is anticipated and bemoaned by a chorus of enticing augurs. As in melodrama, all of Borel's asides share the common trait of manipulating the reader's expectations. Yet Borel's moralising strategy is directly opposed to that of more popular genres.

While walking along the banks of the river, Dina comes across a gondola, and on a whim, asks the boatman to ferry her along the river for an hour. The boatman rapes and kills Dina, but not before engaging her in a cruel and deliberate conversation in which he reveals his sadism, and intitiates the first serious shift in the moral perspective of the story. The boatman recounts his philosophy of crime. He began his career as a rapist during war:

> Aussi, à la dernière guerre d'Allemagne, m'étais-je enrôlé volontaire; et, Dieu sait! que j'y ai semé plus de Français que je n'y ai tué d'Allemands.[60]

But he soon found that violence was a means of combatting the injustice that he saw perpetrated against his own peasant class. The boatman contemplates the hypocrisy of the 'droit de concupiscence'– the right of the nobleman to demand sexual favours from local subjects– and opens speculation on the nature of sexual violence as a means of oppression that finds expression not only in war-time and in feudal society, but more subtly among the bourgeoisie of Lyon:

> Souvent, quand j'étais soldat, et la nuit en védette, je réfléchissais, et je me disais:– Nous autres paysans, nos sœurs, nos filles et nos femmes sont toujours pour MM. les seigneurs, les nobles, les bourgeois; ce sont eux qui violentent nos amies, et nous autres bétas nous ne faisons jamais rien à leurs femmes, à leurs

[60]Ibid., p. 246.

> filles; cela n'est pas juste. Je me disais aussi:– Pourquoi donc nous autres que nous sommes pauvres, et eux autres sont-ils riches?[61]

Ironically, sexual violence is seen simultaneously as a form of oppression and liberation by the boatman. Rape by the ruling classes is oppressive, but his crimes are a means of fighting back against the primordial injustice of which his own class is victim. The bourgeois reader of Borel's epoch, while outraged by his crime, would certainly feel even more unsettled by his views on the relationship between power (nobility, wealth and war) and sexual violence. Here we see the ironic personification of the work's subtitle – the moralist cloaked in immorality.

The boatman robs Dina of her jewelry, saying that it will be made a present to his sister. He ties and gags her, rapes her and then throws her body into the river. The focus upon physical detail and the nonchalance of Borel's description of her death mirror the final scenes of the previous stories:

> Et Jean Ponthu [le batelier] à la proue de sa barque, un harpon à la main, penché, refoulait et renfonçait sous l'eau le corps de Dina, chaque fois qu'il remontait à la surface.[62]

The following day, Jean Ponthu, the boatman, presents himself at the *maison de ville* to demand two *pistoles* recompense for the recuperation of the body of a victim of drowning, Dina, whom he claims to have discovered that morning. The reader's outrage at this turn of events must be as severe as it is unanticipated. Not only will the boatman go unpunished, but he will be paid as a consquence of his crime! The port captain questions him about the cadaver, and the ensuing dialogue further exacerbates the sense of injustice. The port captain's answer to Ponthu's demand comes in the form of a punchline in the penultimate scene's final sentence, pushing the tragedy of the situation so far off the scale that the absurdity forces a paradoxical reaction on the part of the

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[61]Ibid., p. 247.

[62]Ibid., p. 248.

reader. The sudden release of tension necessarily elicits a strong emotional response that, in my own presentation of this story to friends and colleagues in conversation and in seminars, is expressed in nervous laughter. How should one react to a chain of events that, like the structure of a joke, apparently exceeds the limits of congruity until the final moment when, with a revelation, the previously disparate elements suddenly snap into place? The structure would elicit laughter, but the subject matter horrifies.

> –Le cadavre a-t-il été reconnu?
> –Oui, messire, c'est une jeune fille, nommée Dina, enfant d'un nommé Israël Judas, un lapidaire.
> –Une juive?
> –Oui, messire, une hérétique, une huguenote...une juive...
> –Une juive!...Tu vas pêcher des juifs maroufle! et tu as le front, après cela, de venir demander récompense?– Holà! valets! holà! Martin! holà! Lefabre!...mettez-moi ce butor à la porte, ce paltoquet!
> –Qui pêche un hérétique, monsieur le batelier, pêche un chien.[63]

In the last scene of the story, Aymar returns to Lyon. Upon entering the city, he sees a funeral procession and an open grave in the unhallowed cemetary reserved for heretics and suicides. He asks a passerby the identity of the deceased, and discovers that the funeral is for Dina. The melodramatic hyperbole of Aymar's reaction lends a note of absurdity to the deepening tragedy:

> –Eh! toi, vieillard, élargis cette fosse!..., dit-il en jetant sa bourse au fossoyeur; puis il cria contre le ciel, et d'une voix retentissante:
> –Dina!...Israël!...éternité!...
> Et se déchargea dans la tête les pistolets de ses arçons.[64]

There is a note of irony in the paradox of Aymar's melodramatic and vocal anticipation of an afterlife with his fiancée, and Borel's repeated emphasis on the physical annihilation of death. Aymar's suicide is depicted in rhetorical terms that resemble the ennobling

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[63]Ibid., p. 253.

[64]Ibid., p. 257.

suicides in fiction of misunderstood lovers who find union and liberation in death; yet such a death cannot exist in Borel's literary universe.

Melodrama, Autobiography and The Symbolics of Erudition

The previous examples have focused upon Borel's relationship with his reader, as expressed in narrative structure. But there are other equally important means through which Borel portrays his malaise within society. In the following examples, I will discuss Borel's attitudes to his own literary vocation.

In four stories, Borel treats the nature of his relationship and responsibilities to his text and to his public through portraits that correspond to his own literary persona. Although certain elements of the previously discussed fiction are present, the main literary interest of the following stories lies in their characterisation, and not in their narrative structure. Again, we shall encounter a strong relationship with the paradigms of melodrama. But in the following instances, the ethical critique is less strong. There exists a general attack on popular superstition and on slavery, but the negativity that we have previously seen in Borel's narrative irony is nowhere evident. His subjects 'Don Andréa Vésalius, l'anatomiste' and 'Three Fingered Jack, l'obi' are clearly meant to appear autobiographical. Persecuted innocence is a strong and recurring theme, both in melodrama and in Borel's descriptions of his literary alter-ego and his characters. In 'Don Andréa Vésalius' and 'Three Fingered Jack', the main characters are misunderstood and persecuted by an ignorant public because of their erudition, seclusion and the misanthropy that the public perceives in their aversion to society; all of these traits are aggravated and distorted by the society that pursues them. Yet despite the preponderance of apparent autobiographical criteria, a certain amount of caution is needed when approaching this genre in Borel. A measure of irony distorts the relationship between

autobiographical caricature and the author himself, but Borel does not display the Baudelairean self-loathing that one might expect had he focused the causticity or the duplicity of the narrative strategies and imagery of 'De l'Argentière' or 'Dina' upon his literary self-portraits. The following stories hint nevertheless at Borel's perceived relationship with his work and with his literary vocation, though nothing feels as palpable as his animosity towards his readership.

'Three Fingered Jack, l'obi'

In the story 'Three Fingered Jack, l'obi' we encounter Borel's incarnation as the 'caraïbe'. The main character, 'Three-Fingered Jack', is a witch doctor, or *obiman*, who is pursued by local authorities on the island of Jamaica. There is a strong element of mock autobiography in the description of Jack's emotional and intellectual constitution:

> Jack était une de ces organisations fortes, un de ces cerveaux puissans, nés pour dominer, qui manquant d'air dans l'étroite cage où le sort les a jetés, dans cette société qui veut tout courber, tout rapetisser à la taille vulgaire, rompent à tout jamais avec les hommes qu'ils exècrent s'ils ne rompent avec la vie. *Three Fingered Jack* était un lycanthrope![65]

As we have seen in the prefaces to *Champavert* and *Rhapsodies*, Borel's portraits of his own relationship with his reader and with his work are not characterised by a single level of expository, autobiographical discourse. Few declarations as simple and straightforward as that concerning the *obi*'s lycanthropy are to be found. Nevertheless, a number of instances in his short fiction reveal Borel's grappling to define the conditions of his literary identity. These descriptive moments are less fraught with ambiguity than many of the narrative elements, and serve to portray the rebellion, suspicion and savagery that characterise Borel's literary project.

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[65]Ibid., p. 171.

'Three Fingered Jack' concerns a story recounted by Abigail, a Jamaican mulatta, who is kidnapped by *Picarouns*, rogue slave traders, and rescued by Three Fingered Jack. The melodramatic formulae are in place: expository and hyperbolic dialogue, an uncomplicated moral predicament, exoticism, simple characterisations and little psychological dimension. Jack presents Abigail with a charm, a small *obi* sachet, which will protect her from further misfortune. Shortly afterward, Abigail's fiancé, Quasher, is commisioned to hunt down and kill Jack. Abigail is torn between her love for her fiancé and her loyalty to the man that saved her life. She finds Jack in the deep forest where he lives, and warns him of the expedition. Meanwhile, Quasher has himself baptised with the Christian name of James Reeder, in the hope of counteracting the power of Jack's witchcraft. He sets off on an expedition with a number of men, and in the end succeeds in locating and killing Jack after a fierce battle reminiscent of 'Jaquez Barraou'. Upon returning to the town, he is presented with a substantial reward. The entire town celebrates the death of the hermit who had so long held them in fear. Abigail is distraught, for not only has she lost her protector, but Reeder, wealthy and ambitious after his exploit, ignores her. In a fit of rage, she stabs him in the heart before an astonished mob. Before she can be captured, she brandishes the *obi* sachet. The mob recoils in terror at the sight of the witch's talisman. Abigail flees to the mountains, where Jack himself once took refuge.

The premise of the story relies on a pretence to realism. It is recounted in the first person, by a narrator (apparently Champavert) who witnessed the drama while on a visit to Jamaica. Yet the final paragraph of the story, after the death of Reeder, recants the claim to truth.

> Quand j'ai dit que j'étais à *Spanishtown* lorsque Sam et Reeder passèrent, ce n'est pas vrai, j'en ai menti par ma gorge!...[66]

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[66] Ibid., p. 179.

Borel claims that all of the historical sources that he had cited in the story were falsified, but none the less, he claims that injustice is still prevalent in the English colonies of the Caribbean, and the reader should trust him that stories much like 'Three Fingered Jack' occur every day. Why this sudden recantation? Borel was certainly uncomfortable with any stable position, be it in regards to historical narrative, himself, his public, his texts. He undermines the premise upon which the value of the story lies, and thus leaves his reader with a less substantial image of his own ideas and experience than this reader had perhaps hoped to gain.

More significant than the pretense of the story is the theme of the hermitic erudite that relates to Borel's own literary persona. Jack's violent attachment to liberty is both protected by and symbolised in the talisman or *obi* that he carries with him. A common prop of melodrama, the talisman or sacred object designates Jack's opposition to the Christianity and tyranny of the English, then occupiers of Jamaica. The *obi* merits an entire short chapter of the story, entitled 'Tiresome Chapter', in which Borel explains some of the history and myths of early nineteenth-century Jamaica, borrowed ostensibly from a fabled work, *Treatise on Sugar* by one Dr. Moseley. The self-conscious sarcasm of the title 'Tiresome Chapter' demonstrates Borel's understanding of the mock erudition therein as a self-conscious, Sternian diversion from the accelerating flow of action.

> Avant d'aller plus avant, comme j'ai déjà parlé d'*obi* , d'*obiman* et de sachet *obien*, il est bon que je dise à vous autres Européens ce que c'est qu'un *obi*.
>
> Quant aux érudits qui croiront le savoir, ou qui auront lu ce qui suit dans le docteur Mosely, ils n'auront qu'à passer ce chapitre pédantesque et académiquement fastidieux.[67]

The chapter has little relation to the flow of the story, but expresses Borel's need to demonstrate erudition and 'mystifier le public', in the accusing words of one of his first critics. In addition, the ostensibly scrupulous recounting of the 'pedantic' details of the

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[67]Ibid., p. 163.

treatise presents Borel with the occasion to allude to concrete, biographical parallels with Jack, and with the model of the erudite hermit/mystic. Borel is careful to highlight Jack's *montagnard* origins, and the symbolism of his frequent descents into the world of men to pillage the work of tyrants and defend the weak. The history that Borel recounted of his family's participation in the Revolution of 1789 carried the same symbols. His father had commerce with a band of counter-revolutionaries who descended from their mountain refuge near Lyon to wreak vengeance upon revolutionary forces.[68] Borel views his literary endeavours in the same symbolic terms:

> Pauvre bon homme [Dr. Mosely]! il ne se doutait guère, en écrivant à la Jamaïque sur ses cannes à sucre, qu'il se faisait une postérité, et qu'il serait question de lui, de son *Treatise of Sugar*, et de son récit de Jack, en 1832. O incompréhensible *encatenation* des événements! Il a fallu pour en venir là, qu'un montagnard alpestre naquit, descendit, et cherchant à user sa vigueur parmi les hommes de la plaine, se prit à farfouiller un bouquin anglais.[69]

The pretence here is nearly identical to that which characterised the preface to *Champavert*. Champavert, the pretended author, brings Jack to life (complete with an infusion of morality that one would not have seen in his previous incarnation in the *Treatise of Sugar*) from a work that would otherwise have been neglected. The same process was at work when the 'benevolent' narrator claimed to present the life and fiction of Champavert himself, with a moral paradigm that displayed a comparable claim to truth, and a comparable duplicity. The implied autobiographical connection underlying Borel's interest in reviving the myth of the lycanthropic *obiman* is as strong as it is insubstantial: the shared savagery, nobility and love of liberty; an immersion in arcane and scorned science (Borel's love of obscure etymology/Jack's primitive sorcery). Borel, the man, lies somewhere beneath the refractive potential of numerous levels of super-posed narrative: we hear the voice of Jack through the recounting of Dr. Mosely,

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[68]See Clarétie, Jules, *Pétrus Borel, le lycanthrope*, Chapter I.

[69]Borel, *Champavert*, p. 164.

recounted by Champavert, recounted by the fictional editor (Borel?). To whom do we attribute the 'Tiresome Chapter'?

For Borel, the history of a work of literature involves the sort of distortion to which his personality and intentions were subject in the popular press. He frequently alludes to the editorial difficulties and the transformations that a story or personal history undergo when passed from author to editor, to translator or to public. Much of his correspondence regarding his arduous novel, *Madame Putiphar*, involves similar difficulties.[70] The following epigraph from 'Don Andréa Vésalius' follows the uncertain history of the anatomist's tale, and emphasizes the distortion that affects a narrative through its passage and translation from author to author:

> Cette nouvelle d'Andréa Vésalius étant terminée, elle fut portée à la *Revue de Paris* et offerte à M. Amédée Pichot, comme traduite du danois d'un supposé Isaïe Wagner; sa forme ne convenait point à ce magasin littéraire, M. Amédée Pichot ne put l'insérer; mais, en ayant payé la traduction prétendue, il se servit du même héros pour broder le charmant conte anatomique qu'assurément vous avez lu dans ce recueil. Du reste, ce conte, n'ayant aucun rapport de détail avec celui-ci, nous ne venons donc réclamer pour Champavert que priorité et trouvaille.[71]

The final product has nothing to do with the original story.

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'Don Andréa Vésalius, l'anatomiste'

'Don Andréa Vésalius, l'anatomiste' details the troubled marriage of the Dutch physician and his pursuit of scientific research in Spain in the face of public miscomprehension and superstition. Among the tales of the collection, 'Don Andréa

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[70]See Ch. 4 of this thesis, pp. 184-6.

[71]Borel, *Champavert*, p. 112.

Vésalius' has had the most popular appeal and is the only story so far to be translated into English.[72]

The story takes place in sixteenth-century Spain. The opening scene involves an angry and superstitious crowd gathering before the house of the anatomist on his wedding night. They believe him to be a sorcerer. The various voices in the crowd, representing facets of popular morality of the epoch, are quick to denounce Don Andréa's science as heretical. The narrator's mistrust of popular morality and his anticlericalism are clear in his depiction of a group of monks haranguing the mob:

> –Chrétiens! cet homme est un hérétique! un nécroman! un Flamand! Il mérite la mort! dirent alors bénignement quelques moines du couvent de *Nuestra Señora de Atocha*, nouvellement fondé par les pères Garcia de Loaysa, inquisiteur général, archevêque de Séville, et Fray Juan Hurtado de Mendoza, confesseur de l'empereur Carlos V, auxquels se joignirent en masse les religieux du couvent royal de *San Geronymo*.
>
> –A mort! criait la foule, que repoussaient les hallebardiers, lui jurant à la face.
>
> –A mort! répétait le cavalier emmantelé.
>
> –A mort! hurlaient les moines qui, crucifix au poing, attisaient la populace. A mort! mettons le feu![73]

Borel's somewhat tedious recounting of the monastery's origins and benefactors implies that the hypocrisy of which the monks are guilty reaches through the ranks of the church. The opposition of both popular and ecclesiastical morality to the vagabond life and witchcraft of Three Fingered Jack, and to the hermitic existence and occult science of Andréa Vésalius, demands their death.

Vésalius' young wife is chronically unfaithful to him. In the final scenes of the story, Vésalius invites his wife to observe his experiments. His seclusion and his diligence are understood in the context of his devotion to science, yet his erudition plays a more sinister role at the moment that his wife realises that her lovers have furnished

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[72]'Andreas Vesalius, the Anatomiste' in *Oxford Book of Gothic Tales*, Chris Baldick, ed. (Oxford: OUP, 1993).

[73]Borel, *Champavert*, p. 118.

subjects for his experiments in anatomy. The science of Vésalius is not the systematic discipline developed by the eighteenth century *philosophes*. It represents an occult pursuit that separates Vésalius from the common run of men, and furnishes him with a means to avenge himself upon his wife, much as the science of the *obi* protected Jack by threatening the people that would harm him. The knowledge and processes of science allude then to an alternative morality, and become a vehicle for vengeance upon the ignorance of the public whose censure impedes the liberty and creativity of the artist or sage. Vésalius is a Romantic scientist, a tortured and persecuted genius in the mould of Mary Shelley's Dr. Frankenstein.

The moral pretexts of scientific investigation obscure the destructive and often ironic function that science and erudition play in the short fiction of Borel. The irony becomes clear when Vesalius shows the bodies to his wife:

> –Reconnais-tu cet homme?
> –Quoi! ces ossemens?...
> –Reconnais-tu ce pourpoint, cette cape brune?
> –Oui, monseigneur, c'est la cape du cavalier Alderan!
> –Regardez donc bien, señora; et reconnaissez aussi ce beau cavalier qui portait cette cape, avec lequel vous dansâtes si galamment à nos noces?
> –Alderan!...–Maria jeta un cri qui eût évoqué des morts.
> –Au moins, Doña, vous voyez que tout est profit à la science, lui dit-il, se retournant vers elle d'un air froid; vous le voyez, la science vous a de grandes obligations.[74]

Arcana and erudition work in 'Don Andréa Vésalius' and 'Three Fingered Jack' as talismans, like the *obi*, that separate the possessors from the proponents of the detestable moral *status quo*. There is little actual interest in the subjects of erudition *per se*, such as etymology or anatomy, with which Borel pretends acquaintance. Instead, their subjects represent intellectual pursuits comprising an occult moral character that threatens established areas of inquiry and the social hierarchy that they compose and support.

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[74]Ibid., p. 138.

> La science de l'*obi* est très étendue, plus étendue que la pharmacologie et la pharmacochimie, et, s'il y avait un examen à passer pour être reçu *obi*, plus d'un de nos brillans pharmacopoles aurait le nez cassé et serait bouté hors [...][75]

Borel often alludes to occult sciences that exist outside of and threaten the established order. There is a similar moral framework in the literature of Balzac. The preponderance of conspiracies and uprisings during the first years of the 1830s, and the prevalence of mysticism and occult symbolism in a political context were reflected in much literature of the time.[76]

The characters Three Fingered Jack and Don Andréa Vésalius are solitary figures who would not normally be the protagonists of melodramatic plot. They are outlaws whose presence threatens the eventual re-affirmation of hierarchical and presumably middle-class values. The models of morality that form the centre of each story thus imply the mutability of moral standards. The independence and erudition of the lycanthropic character, representing a form of Socratic Irony in its critical affront to established ethics, are the only constants.

The symbolics of erudition provide the link in many instances between the 'autobiographical' moments and the ethical critique of the work. Certainly, Borel wants to present himself and the characters that he chooses to represent lycanthropic traits as misunderstood sages whose intellectual fibre keeps them apart from the rest of humanity. Thus, he returns to the critical pretext that cements the bond between author and reader (the literary intimacy invoked when the reader is invited to share in the author's mental life: 'descendre dans l'intimité d'un être sensible'). For the reader, an intimate knowledge

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[75]Ibid., p. 165.

[76]Much occult symbolism was employed by utopian socialists. Enid Starkie gives a good account of the 'Evadanistes' cult to which some of the *bousingos* were brief adherents. (Starkie, Enid, *Petrus Borel, the Lycanthrope*, Ch. 3) Theologians and philosophers such as Ballanche and De Maistre provided theological answers to the bloodshed of the Revolution of 1789, whose horror and lingering emotional impact were, for some, impediments to rational conception of the events. Swedenborgian ideas of occult correspondence appeared in moral and political contexts, where conspiracy and divine intervention were viewed in the complexity of political turmoil. These issues will be discussed in depth along with the philosophical basis of *Madame Putiphar* in the following chapters.

of the characters and of Borel's literary persona is valuable because of the characters' insight; but such intimacy is perilous because the knowledge that the characters may share challenges the fixity of conventional learning and morality. This challenge is hidden by the legitimising pretext to scientificity that such 'negative' science enjoys in Borel. Irony remains the dominant component in a relationship of contradictory impulses: the intellectual complexity of the author-as-subject serves as the pretext for the narrator of the preface to endear his subject to the reader. Yet the same pretext keeps the subject inaccessible to the vast majority of readers.

Borel's conspicuous displays of erudition are tied inextricably to the techniques of author and reader relations. There is a parallel between the cleverly disguised morality of the tales, and Borel's deviation from grammatical and orthographic standards. Borel rejects not only political orthodoxy, but literary convention. In a fashion similar to that through which he claimed to dispel the reader's dearly held illusions, Borel as Champavert claims that his eccentricities of language refer to some deep knowledge of etymology:

> [...] je crois être, modestie à part, assez agréable étymologiste; ayant fait force recherches paléographiques et paléologiques, entre autres, à l'age innocent de seize ans, un gros in-folio, dignes de bénédictins de Saint-Maure, sur l'origine des noms propres d'hommes et de lieux, petit puits artésien de science et d'érudition [...][77]

He claims to return to more 'authentic' forms of spelling and syntax that have been deformed over centuries. His erudition distinguishes him from the common reader, and implies a struggle against the mutability and even decadence of language. In the preface, the narrator recounts the persecution of the young Champavert by his schoolmasters because of his interest in the evolution of language. The schoolmasters, as the guardians of language and ideology, saw his research as a threat and burned his books:

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[77]Borel, *Champavert*, p. 164.

> [...] il s'entourait toujours de cinq à six grammaires d'idiomes anciens et modernes, et d'ouvrages savans qu'il se procurait avec peine, et que ses maîtres honteux lui brûlaient à mesure.[78]

His eccentricity and erudition express a moral value. Such a value would lure the reader to overcome the difficulties of reading Borel's language in order to grasp the 'authentic' sense that it conveys. The apparent 'authenticity', existent or not, is related to Borel's Rousseauian longing for a primitive and blameless state of existence. He views the corrupting influences of society and of urban life as having saturated even the structures of language.

In addition, the fashion for eccentricity of the period was often expressed in strange habits of typography and spelling.[79] Borel's spelling of *idiosyncrasie*, *rhapsode* and *rhapsodies* along with myriad other words was as much a product of this eccentric fashion as of an ideological struggle of Borel's. Aristide Marie, in the notes to the 1922 edition of *Champavert*, recounts the importance of his effort to respect the original spellings of Borel's manuscript, where he encountered 'dans le style de son œuvre, maintes [...] singularités d'écriture et bon nombre de néologismes [...]'[80]

The fashion of *bousingo* and *jeune-France* literature encouraged demonstrations of erudition that coincided with the Romantic obsession with certain foreign cultures and past epochs. Mérimée, too, was interested in etymology. Medievalism, Spain, the Orient, all provided pretences for displays of learning that distinguished the *jeune-France* from the norm, and implied an ethic and aesthetic of non-conformity. Borel's chapter titles and epigraphs spring from obscure sources in numerous languages; their connections to the texts are at times tenuous, although they often serve as humorous counterpoint to the peripetia - for instance, not just the title 'Tiresome Chapter', but also

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[78]Ibid., p. 12.

[79]Sangsue, Daniel, *Le récit excentrique* (Paris: José Corti, 1987) p. 17.

[80]Borel, *Champavert*, p. 389.

'Quod legit non potest' (regarding Don Andréa's implied sexual impotence), or they are simply Nodieresque nonsensicalities such as 'Goudoumar! Goullamas!' Gautier parodies this tendency in *Les Jeunes-Frances* when he recounts Ferdinand's advice to Daniel Jouvard on the subject of becoming an author in the *jeune-France* style:

> Voulez-vous faire un livre? prenez plusieurs livres; ceci diffère essentiellement de la Cuisinère bourgeoise, qui dit, Voules-vous un civet? prenez un lièvre. Vous détachez un feuillet ici, un feuillet là, vous faites une préface et une postface, vous prenez un pseudonyme, vous dites que vous êtes mort de consomption ou que vous vous êtes lavé la cervelle avec du plomb, vous servez chaud, et vous escamotez le plus joli petit succès qu'il soit possible de voir. Une chose qu'il faut soigner, ce sont les épigraphes. Vous en mettez en Anglais, en Allemand, en Espagnol, en Arabe; si vous pouvez vous en procurer en Chinois, cela fera un effet merveilleux, et sans être Panurge vous vous trouverez insensiblement possesseur d'une mignonne réputation d'érudit et de polyglotte, qu'il ne tiendra qu'à vous d'exploiter.[81]

Champavert was the model of this literary formula that relied for success upon both its pretence to authenticity and its provocative obscurity.

Faces of the Lycanthrope: Duplicity and Autobiography in 'Passereau, l'écolier' and 'Champavert, le lycanthrope'

The characters of 'Passereau' and 'Champavert', the pretended author of the stories, provide greater psychological depth and greater insight into Borel's relationship to his authorial voice and texts than any previous characters. They demonstrate greater originality in their exemplification of Borel's irony than did Three-Fingered Jack or Don Andréa Vésalius. Passereau, and to a lesser extent Champavert, do not conform to the positive, melodramatic dynamic wherein a character and his moral function are

[81]Gautier, Théophile, *Les Jeunes-France, romans goguenards*, pp. 97-98. Gautier's sarcasm clearly applies to Borel as much as anyone. A fascination with erudition that mocked the reader's ignorance and proposed an aesthetic of non-conformity became even more important in the 1880s, with the development of Symbolism and Decadence. For a short time, Huysmans enjoyed the reputation of an accomplished Latin scholar because of his chapter in *A Rebours* that recounts Des Esseintes' taste in Decadent Latin authors. It was soon discovered that the chapter had been copied almost word for word from an existing scholarly work.

synonymous. Even Vésalius and Jack were synonymous with the traits of the *lycanthrope*. Singularity best characterises the 'autobiographical' characters of the final two stories of the collection; their singularity implies an opposition to standards of behaviour, literary and sartorial, that ties them to the larger ethical critique launched by Borel's fiction. Champavert and Passereau are expressions of a mobile, negative irony. They personify Borel's subversive project, whose complexity supersedes the firm and reassuring structure of conventional characterisation and of melodrama. They are precursors of the destructive irony and lassitude of the post-Romantic dandy, for whom life holds no charm. Even the splendour of nature, a source of Romantic fascination, is the subject of profound cynicism:

> [...] la monotonie, la sempiternelle physionomie de la nature [...] Rien n'est-il plus ennuyeux qu'une fixité, qu'une mode inamovible, qu'un almanach perpétuel.[82]

Borel flees from the fixity of melodramatic characterisation and from the affirmation of social codes that such fixity entails. Borel's characters are anti-heroes whose subversion elicits a vertiginous fear of the gaps that their instigation of moral uncertainty opens. It is that same fear of death without an afterlife that we saw in *Rhapsodies*.

The mobility of Borel's own destructive irony strongly affects the portrayal of the 'autobiographical' characters. Both Passereau and Champavert enact the moral drama that the narrator initiated in the preface – the dispelling of illusions. Both characters embody contradictory forces that are, in the end, self-annihilating: an immersion in the thematics and imagery of Romantic cliché, in opposition to a savage rejection of all that is stable. Each character's self-destructive journey demonstrates a different aspect of negative irony for which Borel was celebrated. The similarity in the thematics and plot structure of each story allows for a simple examination of the contrasts of the two.

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[82]Borel, Pétrus, *Champavert*, p. 363.

'Passereau, l'écolier' demonstrates Borel's mastery of black humour and the absurd; the prevalence of situational irony allows for scenes whose incongruity is at once humorous and disturbingly provocative. 'Champavert' typifies the excess and morbidity of the charnel-house school. In the final story, Borel demonstrates his tendency to overwhelm the reader with ghastly detail and to construct a plot that spirals toward a shocking tragedy whose violence is unanticipated.

'Passereau, l'écolier'

'Passereau, l'écolier' concerns the loss of illusions. The story follows Passereau, a naive student, as he learns of the infidelity of his mistress. The revelation drives him to despair, and in a plot twist not unlike the dénouement of Lassailly's *Les Roueries de Trialph*, he concocts an ingenious and gruesome plan to avenge himself upon his mistress and her lover. Throughout the story, the naivety of Passereau is counterbalanced by the comical cynicism of his companion Albert.

Although the story focuses largely upon Passereau, there are many elements of Borel's own cynicism expressed through Albert. Albert's cruelty and cutting sarcasm are frequently juxtaposed with the integrity and naivety of Passereau. The constant contradiction of points of view is an inherent element in Borel's literary voices. Borel's voices tend to counteract each other, such that the final impression is one of a disappearing perspective. For example, the narrator of the preface pretended to give positive facts as clues to the mind of Champavert; yet his patchy illumination of Champavert's character, coupled with Champavert's literary suicide, undermined any certain determination of Champavert's or the narrator's character or intentions. The narrator's apparent goodwill, and Champavert's elusiveness and misanthropy, counteract

each other. In a similar fashion, Passereau's point of view approaches that of Albert, yet this assimilation leads to Passereau's suicide. The two characters systematically work to cancel each other out.

In 'Passereau', there is considerably less dissimulation of the direction of the narrative than in previous stories. Unlike the plot structures of Borel's more provocative and manipulative narratives, there is an unmistakable foretaste of the peripetia and of the eventual outcome in the first sentence: 'Heureusement, mon cher Passereau, que je ne crois point à la vertu des femmes [...]'[83] declaims Albert to his naive and Romantic friend. The first scene follows Passereau and Albert's discussion of the existence of virtue among women. The issue is a pretext that echoes Borel's larger concerns with integrity and particularly with artistic integrity. Albert argues that everyone must reconcile themselves to material demands. He remains lightheartedly cynical in the face of infidelity and recounts an anecdote in which he discovered an elderly lover in his mistress's apartments. His insouciance made him the master of an uncomfortable situation. In the space of a conversation, he quit his mistress, and became fast friends with her elderly patron.

Passereau clings to the notion that his own mistress is unerringly faithful; despite hard evidence, he refuses to believe that she has taken on other lovers in exchange for money. He is unwilling to accept what he views as a compromise of virtue. There is an element of self-portraiture in Borel's depiction of Passereau's stubborness, and in his unwillingness to accept the consequences of his mistress's poverty; or at least, one can clearly distinguish traits in Passereau that composed Borel's literary alter-ego. The character echoes Borel's sentiments in *Rhapsodies*, in which women shower affections upon modish poets, attracted by the opulence and sophistication that they cultivate. Both Champavert and Passereau long for more transparent and profound relations, reliant upon

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[83]Ibid.,p. 263.

integrity of character, and not upon the necessities of commerce and ambition. The voice of Albert is the ironic counterpoint to Borel's less duplicitous voices. Albert tells Passereau of the irony that helped him overcome the shock of the discovery of his own mistress's infidelity. He treats her compromise with biting sarcasm, and a nonchalance that humiliates her:

> -Albert, que vous êtes cruel! De grâce, ne me repoussez pas sans m'entendre, si vous saviez?
> -J'étais pure quand j'étais sans besoin. - Si vous saviez jusq'où peut vous pousser la faim et la misère?...
> -Et la paresse, madame.[84]

Passereau goes through various stages of despair and disillusionment as it grows clear that his mistress has taken on a rich and elderly lover for profit. He is at turns humorously self-destructive, then frighteningly vindictive. The paradox of his simultaneous ridiculousness and self-hatred is typified in perhaps the most celebrated instance of situational irony and black humour in the collection, and perhaps in Borel's whole work. Every reviewer of *Champavert*, without exception, has commented on the following passage. In the chapter that Borel self-consciously entitles 'Incongruité', Passereau visits the local executioner in the hope of putting an end to his uncertainty and jealousy:

> –Je venais vous prier humblement, je serais très sensible à cette condescendance de vouloir bien me faire l'honneur et l'amitié de me guillotiner.
> –Qu'est cela?
> –Je désirerais ardemment que vous me guillotinassiez![85]

There is a distinct irony in the grace and humour that characterises Passereau's determination to have himself killed. It is Borel's 'rire de damné' in the face of annihilation.

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[84] Ibid., p. 266.

[85] Ibid., p. 303.

Closely related to the mobility of Borel's Romantic Irony is this type of black humour for which he is equally famous. Borel's humour relies on the incongruity of the situations that he relates: the tensions between morbidity and lightheartedness, between cynicism and emotion; and equally between the anticipation of narrative climax, and the sudden and frequent shifts in perspective and tone. But many elements of Borel's black humour are more straightforward than the subtler elements of irony embedded within the structures of his narrative. They rely largely upon contrasts between characters and situations, and are often driven by Borel's skill with humorous dialogue. In his sketch 'Le Croquemort' for Curmer's *Les français peints par eux-mêmes*, Borel recounts a misunderstanding between an undertaker and some unwitting clients.

> Vous êtes à fumer gaiement avec des amis, et vous attendez quelques rafraîchissements. -Pan, pan! on cogne à votre porte. -Qui est là? -C'est moi monsieur, qui vous apporte la bière. -Est-elle blanche? -Oui Monsieur. - Bien: déposez-la dans l'antichambre, et revenez chercher les bouteilles demain. - L'homme obéit et se retire. Mais quelle est votre surprise quand, accourant sur ses pas, vous vous trouvez nez à nez avec une horrible boîte![86]

These moments most often serve to heighten the ambiguous tone of situations that are difficult to understand simply as tragic or comic. The prevalence of black humour challenges the reader's ability to classify what has been read in much the same way as the ironising structure of Borel's narrative.

'Passereau' concludes with the enactment of Passeareau's hideous plot to kill himself, his mistress and simultaneously to take vengeance on his rival, Colonel Vogtland. Passereau lures his mistress to an abandoned garden, where he pushes her down a well. As she struggles in the water, he taunts her about her infidelity and pushes the loose and ageing stones of the well down onto her head. The following day he has a duel with the colonel, whom he had earlier provoked. Before the colonel kills him, he

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[86]Borel, Pétrus, 'Le Croquemort' in Curmer, *Les Français peints par eux-mêmes* (Paris: L. Curmer, 1840), vol. II, 121-33.

asks, as his last wish, that the colonel visit the garden and the well. The unsuspecting colonel agrees, and Passereau dies.

The story ends here, as Passereau commits suicide while avenging himself on the characters whose desires represented his persecution. A nearly identical, ironic and negative moral drama is enacted in 'Champavert, le lycanthrope'.

'Champavert, le lycanthrope'

'Champavert, le lycanthrope' contains the most deliberately 'autobiographical' elements of any of the stories in the collection, although one obvious and serious ambiguity remains. Is the story an epitaph written before suicide by Champavert himself? Is the story a recollection and addition to the collection by the fictional editor/narrator of the preface? Obviously, there can be no genuinely firm autobiographical connection. No one was present to observe Champavert's sermon and his suicide who survived the event to recount it.

The tale of Champavert is less a narrative than a testament. It contains numerous philosophical monologues by the principal character. The plot, which serves as a pretext for Champavert's diatribe, concerns his love for a young woman who was forced to kill their son out of shame for a child conceived out of wedlock. The story serves as a metaphor for artistic creation, as much as it attacks sexual ethics. In the eyes of Champavert, society destroys its bastard children. Non-conformity of any shape carries a dear price.

The story is the long prelude to Champavert's suicide. The hatred that flows so profusely and freely from Champavert in his speeches before his death mirrors many of Borel's own declarations. The attacks upon the reader in *Rhapsodies*, or upon the critical

establishment from Borel's polemical articles in *La Liberté*, are focused upon society as a whole. Champavert echoes Borel's anticlericalism and irreligion, the violence of his nihilism and his hatred of society:

> Oh! si je tenais l'humanité comme je te tiens là, je l'étranglerais! [...] Si je tenais ton Dieu, je le frapperais comme je frappe cet arbre![87]

More specifically, Champavert rants against the constraints that society places upon the individual, and the ways that society stifles expression. Borel wrote these scenes with artistic creation in mind. The premise of infanticide carries with it questions of the artist's role in society, and the artist's responsibilities to his creation. On a thematic level, Borel rejects the notion that he bears a responsibility to his audience. While he must engage his audience in order to shock them, he attempts to deny their capacity to judge his work.

The whole collection may be viewed as working to subvert the reader's ability to moralise and thus posthumously to judge Borel's literary incarnations. Borel's rejection of the moralising structure of melodrama is also a rejection of its ability to affirm morality, and, in a general sense, to have a meaning for its reader. He refuses to allow a narrative post-script to be constituted from 'his' life:

> [...]le monde est si stupide [...] Quand il apprend la fin d'un suicide, de suite il veut trouver des causes bien rustiques, bien voyantes [...][88]

These words of Champavert, coming at the work's end, contradict the promises of the preface.

In the last scene of the book, Champavert reveals the death of the child his mistress bore him, and exhumes the infant's skeleton. He releases a final torrent of

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[87]Borel, *Champavert*, p. 381.

[88]Ibid., p. 359.

invective against the society that drove the two young lovers to kill their child and to hide their crime:

> –Jusqu'à cette heure, j'avais gardé mon sang froid, mais tant de misères m'enragent [...] si je tenais ma mère, ma mère qui m'a donné la vie, je l'éventrerais! C'est une chose infâme qu'une mère!...Ah! si du moins elle m'avait étouffé dans ses entrailles, comme nous avons fait de notre fils [...]
>
> Monde atroce! il faut donc qu'une fille tue son fils, sinon elle perd son honneur!...Flava! tu es une fille d'honneur, tu as massacré le tien!...tu es une vierge, Flava! Horreur!...[89]

There is a foreshadowing in this scene of Baudelaire's lines on the poet at the opening of *Les Fleurs du Mal*: the self-loathing and the ambiguity of the poet's relation to his creation and to his creator. Champavert's last act is to destroy himself and his mistress, the two symbolic elements of literary creation, the artist and his audience:

> En hurlant ses derniers mots, Champavert lança au loin le cadavre qui, roulant par la pente escarpée, vint tomber et se briser sur les pierres du chemin.
>
> –Champavert! Champavert! achève-moi! râlait Flava, froide et mourante; es-tu prêt, maintenant?...
>
> –Oui!...
>
> –Frappe-moi, que je meure la première!...Tiens, frappe là, c'est mon cœur!...Adieu!!!
>
> –Au néant!!!
>
> A ce dernier mot, Champavert s'agenouilla, mit la pointe du poignard sur le sein de Flava, et, appuyant la garde sur sa poitrine, il se laissa tomber lourdement sur elle, l'étreignit dans ses bras : le fer entra froidement, et Flava jeta un cri de mort qui fit mugir les carrières.
>
> Champavert retira le fer de la plaie, se releva et, tête baissée, descendit la colline et disparut dans la brume et la pluie.[90]

He destroys the evidence of their creation. He kills the mother, against whom he had ranted so vehemently in the previous citation, and finally he takes his own life. Champavert's body is discovered the next day, its neck twisted grotesquely, covered in blood and with the dagger sticking from its chest.

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[89]Ibid., p. 381.

[90]Ibid., p. 383.

With the reading of *Champavert* presented in this thesis, an allegory of creation and self-destruction becomes clear. As in Borel's poetry and previous work, the female figure represents the impetus to create, the sexual drive that pushes the artist. She is his audience and his inspiration, yet she simultaneously carries with her an awareness of the constraints that society places upon courtship and upon sexual behaviour. They are among the strongest demands that society places upon the individual, and non-conformity ensures more certain ostracism than other forms of heterodoxy, be they religious or political. For this reason, the theme of infanticide appears repeatedly in *Champavert*, and will appear again in *Madame Putiphar*. Champavert, the artistic savage, unable to abide the demands of the society he loathes, destroys his creation (the child). It was the bastard product of the artist, and his public, reflected in woman. Art could never be purely the creation of the artist, nor the purely subjective interpretation of public impression. Developing ethical standards, that mirrored the importance of politics and journalism, exercised considerable pressure upon the artist, distorting his creation. Rather than face the chaos of the processes of interpretation during a time of fitful cultural change, Borel preferred to symbolise the destruction of his artistic product. He subsequently kills the mistress, who acts as the artist's link to public values. She represents the painful push-and-pull of his simultaneous desire for recognition and his rejection of its importance. Finally, he destroys himself.

With their suicides, both characters' points of view are reduced to nothing. They are left with no concrete opinions that the reader might use to replace the certainties of which he has been deprived over the course of the book. In the words of Champavert (from the final story):

> Eh! qu'est-ce que la vie sans [les illusions]? une éponge pressée, un squelette à jour, un néant douloureux.[91]

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[91]Ibid., p. 271.

Both Champavert's and Passereau's paths to self-destruction begin with clear intimations of each character's inevitable demise: 'Champavert' starts with a letter to a friend recounting a suicide pact; 'Passereau' opens with Passereau's admission of his fragility and of the tenacity with which he clings to his illusions: '[...] me les enlever, ce serait me tuer!'[92] Each narrative recounts the fulfilment of the characters' self-destructive impulses, introducing along the way various impediments that parody the destructive plot devices of melodrama. In melodrama, such impediments arise to pose a titillating and temporary threat to the inevitable moralising conclusion. In 'Champavert' and 'Passereau', the intention to commit suicide is introduced as the moral premise, and then various positive obligations arise along the course of the story that would tie each character to life. These obligations are systematically rejected, and the result is a species of anti-melodrama.

The 'autobiographical' aspects of both 'Passereau' and 'Champavert' are thus deceptive in more than one sense. The characters are models of a process at the end of which lies inevitable disillusion. The reader may view such a process as mirroring his own condition through his experience of the stories. The short stories prior to 'Passereau' and 'Champavert' demonstrate in some way the consciousness of immorality that pushed Champavert to take his own life. Both characters commit suicide because of attitudes that the reader is forced to share, not only in a descriptive sense, but in an active sense. The intimacy that was held out in the work's preface is not a positive, biographical portrait, as the paradigms of art criticism of the epoch would imply, but instead entails a sharing of the state of mind that drove Champavert to suicide. The reader becomes complicit not only in the violence and immorality of Champavert, but in his torment.

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[92]Ibid., p. 271.

Lassailly's *Les Roueries de Trialph*

There is a similar intention behind Lassailly's *Les Roueries de Trialph*, which appeared less than one year after *Champavert*, and which owes much to Borel's work. Before concluding, I must briefly look at what is Borelian in Lassailly: given that Borel embodied certain traits of his epoch to a high degree, a short comparison between the authors can best bring these to light.

Les Roueries de Trialph was received with little of the shock and scandal that followed *Champavert*, and that Borel wished upon *Rhapsodies*. Nevertheless, shortly after its publication, it was seen as one of the most typical products of the *jeune-France* school.[93] The work borrows much from the stories 'Passereau, l'écolier' and 'Champavert, le lycanthrope'. *Les Roueries de Trialph* is founded on the premise of the author's death:

> –Ou [sic] allons nous?
> –Je vais à la mort...En attendant, je m'amuse à faire un livre, dont mon suicide sera le dénouement.[94]

Unlike in Sainte-Beuve, and in common with Borel, the author's death and biography do not form positive critical tools through which the reader can draw moral or other conclusions from the work. Lassailly's claim to write a work leading to his subject's death serves as the same type of bait found in Borel; it is used to lure the reader to experience a work that promises novelty and extreme sensations. The morality that Lassailly concocts in the final, hallucinatory scenes of the work, while Trialph, due to an opium overdose, dreams of touring hell with Satan as his guide, appears a mocking and

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[93]'Un poète crotté qui est mort fou comme il avait vécu, Lassailly, a écrit un livre digne de rester comme le plus complet monument que nous ayons de la littérature Jeune-France.' (Castille, Hippolyte, *Les Hommes et les mœurs en France sous le règne de Louis-Philippe* (Paris: Henneton, 1853), p. 167.)

[94]Lassailly, Charles, *Les Roueries de Trialph, notre contemporain avant son suicide*, p. V.

improvised conclusion to a work of palpable immorality. The moral of the story involves the same systematic disillusionment, the plot for revenge, and the final analysis of the destructive, ironic nature of the artist's role that we have seen in *Champavert.*

Lassailly's work is an extrapolation of the destructive egotism and nihilism found in 'Champavert, le lycanthrope'. Trialph, the self-destructive *jeune-France*, devises, through a series of intricate plot-twists, the humiliation and deaths of a number of friends and mistresses. The jealousy and vengeance involved are reminiscent of Passereau's murder of his mistress, and his entrapment of Colonel Vogtland.

Significant in the context of *jeune-France* literature is Trialph's view of journalism and literary criticism during his epoch. During a performance of Vigny at the Théâtre Français, he quotes the playwright: 'les français poussent *vaudevillistes*', and then he adds 'et *journalistes*'.[95] His comment is indicative of the consciousness of the pressures that newly professional literary vocations – through the growth of journalism, and the popularity and financial rewards of melodrama– exercised on creative artists. Trialph echoes the sentiments of many minor Romantics that we have seen in the artistic press of the period:

> [...] c'est pitié de voir tout cela, critiques improvisés, dépecer avec leurs ongles maladroits une œuvre de travail, de conscience et d'art.[96]

Toward the end of the work Trialph, having inadvertently taken an overdose of opium destined to kill his boyhood friend and current rival, loses consciousness and, in a dreamlike epiphany, hears the voice of his dead father among visions of seraphim. The voice describes to Trialph the true role of an artist. The description is typically Romantic – the poet is a seer who embodies the intellectual essence of his age, and is bound to guide the spirits of men. But Trialph has serious reservations, and speculates that his gift

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[95]Ibid., p. 39.

[96]Ibid., p. 40.

is wasted on the majority of readers. He is as suspicious of his public as Borel. He instead turns his artistic talents to more destructive, even ironic ends. If one is to judge by Trialph's actions in the story, no one is spared from his misanthropy. His artwork is criminality:

> [...] organisé de manière à chercher des distractions partout, jusque dans les crimes, je me suis mis à l'ouvrage de deux ou trois assassinats, seulement sans doute afin de passer le temps [...][97]

His attitude is nearly identical to that of Borel in regard to the purpose of his art, and embodies the *jeune-France* dilemma: an ironic suspension between the exhilarating and mystical elevation of the poet, and a nihilism fueled by the frustrations and material needs that changing literary institutions engender. There is an anticipation of Leconte de Lisle's view that the poet's duty as spiritual and intellectual guide must be deferred to a more enlightened age.

Lassailly's position as an ironist becomes clearly apparent in comments that he made on the enthusiastic reception of his work as a *jeune-France* masterpiece. Here, Lassailly writes of Gautier's inclusion of him in the preface of *Les Jeunes-France*. Gautier numbered Lassailly among the *jeune-France* group:

> *Les Roueries de Trialph, notre contemporain avant son suicide*, n'ont pas eu cette vogue qui pourrait faire comprendre pourquoi il me compte, dans sa préface, au milieu des siens. Je pense même qu'il n'a pas eu l'intelligence du poême ironique que j'ai livré autrefois sans assez de précautions, à un public qui s'enthousiasmait trop de certains ouvrages, pour qu'il pût soupçonner que je me moquais de tout cela.[98]

It appears that Lassailly had not the intelligence to realise that perhaps Borel and certainly Gautier also '[se] moquai[en]t de tout cela.' Lassailly was responding sarcastically to what he perceived to be a morbid trend that had gone too far. Yet there is

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[97]Ibid., p. vii.

[98]*L'Indépendant, furet de Paris*, 24 December, 1835.

an equal measure of self-parody in Borel and Gautier. Nevertheless, Borel's own more searching irony and dark humour are the key elements that distinguish him from Lassailly; yet they also leave the intentional and autobiographical portions of his work so difficult to evaluate. Characterisations such as that by Lassailly are the sort of thing against which the *jeunes-France* armed themselves expertly.

The Rapid Evolution of Borel's Literary Polemics

At the end of the work, one has no greater sense of having achieved an intimate understanding of a complex and troubled mind than one had after reading the anecdotes and literary fragments recounted by the narrator in the preface. The philosophical position changes little from Champavert's misanthropic observations or the lines of poetry from *Rhapsodies* that the 'benevolent' narrator first shared with the reader.

The final scenes of the collection act as a vanishing point, where the recurrent thematic elements self-destruct without resolving their interdependence or their incompatibility. Passereau's and Albert's competing points of view on the same subject are never unraveled. Champavert's critique of society is never fully explored. Instead, portrayals of public censure, artistic creation, all disappear with the death of Champavert. The mock melodramatic characterisation assures that the whole will provide a compelling and familiar structure for the reader of the 1830s, but the inherent psychological shallowness does not allow for the understanding that was promised in the preface. The reader is brought closer to Champavert by experiencing the disillusionment that the stories' narrative structure assures, the same sort of disillusionment that drove the author to take his life. But the effect is negative, even Socratic. Borel, the narrator, instills uncertainty through his manipulative and deceptive narrative. The reader understands to

some degree the alienation of Champavert, but not in the fashion that would have been promised by the paradigm of Romantic criticism. The end result is deeply ironic.

In following chapters, it will become evident how far Borel was from solving or even exploring in depth some of the questions concerning the role of the artist and the function of his art. Though he expressed, in literary terms, the problems of a dynamic that typified the early 1830s, he lacked the focus or sustained concentration to pursue the questions that his work posed. By nature, Borel's talent was best suited to the concise forms of the short story or the humoristic sketch. Borel was an author similar in stature among his contemporaries to Villiers de l'Isle-Adam; he was recognised as a brilliant orator, and it was felt among his fellow artists that Borel's talent exceeded those of anyone else in his generation. But his promise was never fulfilled. This was perhaps because Borel appeared torn between an overwhelming ambition and a need for recognition on the one hand, and a measure of self-loathing and hatred for his public on the other. He would never fully reconcile the conflicting impulses that resulted. His desires took the form of the provocative and confrontational literary techniques for which he is best remembered. They were also manifest in his fascination with popular literary forms and with melodrama in particular. Despite Borel's fierce misanthropy, the power of melodrama to reach an audience could not be ignored. Borel did not appear ready to employ the engaging elements of melodramatic theme and structure to pursue a sustained campaign against the amorphous bourgeoisie. After the most frenetic years of the *jeune-France* and *bousingo* heyday, Borel went into self-imposed exile, leaving the capital and renting a squalid shack in the Champenois countryside. There he began work on his only novel, *Madame Putiphar*. The novel is more purely melodramatic than anything Borel had produced previously. He suggested himself that he had chosen a path that moved away from more challenging literary questions and from high art, and that he endeavoured to produce a straightforward, popularly engaging (and one would assume,

profitable) work. By his own admission, *Madame Putiphar* was a 'bad' novel: 'Que c'est difficile à faire, même un mauvais livre!'[99]

Madame Putiphar also represents a distinct change in the tone of Borel's address to his readership. The polemical or misleading preface that shaped the ethical dimension of *Rhapsodies* or *Champavert* is absent from his later work. Instead, one finds in the work authorial interjections and asides that ask politely for the reader's patience, or that express Borel's desire to please his reader. Never before had he expressed the wish that his work would be appreciated by anyone outside his close circle of literary friends. Even the apparent goodwill of the narrator of *Champavert* is counterbalanced by the pain of his duty to strip away the public's illusions; *Champavert* is presented as a valuable, but unpleasing work.

The reasons for Borel's change in attitude are many. Fortunately, Borel left a substantial correspondence concerning the editorial difficulties and the hopes that he held for *Madame Putiphar*. Deciphering the difficult history of his final project reveals a great deal about the last throes of his furious, almost Rimbaldian career.

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[99]Letter from Borel to O'Neddy reprinted in Steinmetz, Jean-Luc, 'Les Malheurs du Récit' in Borel, *Madame Putiphar* (Paris: Régine Desforges, 1972) , p. 415.

Chapter 4

Pétrus Borel's *Madame Putiphar*

For many critics of Borel, the half-decade between the publication of Champavert and the publication of Madame Putiphar is viewed as a mysterious silence. Certainly, Borel produced a small number of short stories and articles, including a translation of Robinson Crusoe which remains the most popular and respected version in France of Defoe's work.[1] Borel was not idle, but critics have seen this dearth of major literary work as an opportunity for speculation. A number of letters that Borel addressed to friends and literary colleagues attest to his struggle during this period with the novel *Madame Putiphar*. Some time in late 1836, Borel moved to primitive accommodation in the countryside of Champagne, '[...] une hutte de boue et de chaume, entre deux mares, ou plutôt deux margouillis [...]'[2] There he suffered not only the ravages of supposed malnutrition and poverty, but struggled with a work that showed none of the creative and savage 'spontaneity' or drive of the 'bave' and 'scorie' that was *Rhapsodies*.

> J'y travaille sans relâche, surtout depuis une quinzaine de jours, mais pour cela, ça ne va pas très vite [...]
> Quant à ton ami, tout en travaillant comme un laboureur, il se voit encore pour un mois de souffrances.[3]

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[1] Borel's translation appeared shortly after the translation by Madame Tastu, and remained the definitive French version of the text well into the twentieth century. Defoé, Daniel, *Robinson Crusoë*, transl. Pétrus Borel (Paris: F. Borel and A. Varenne, 1836).

[2] From a letter to Philothée O'Neddy, published with other correspondence and documents in *Madame Putiphar*, p. 415.

[3] Ibid.

Previous critics have then seen this period as one of creative incubation that resulted in the enigmatic literary still-birth that was *Madame Putiphar*. Given the pain and labour of this work's inception, and given the lack of popular or critical response, it is understandable that critics view *Madame Putiphar* as the final stumbling block in a fitful and fatally destined literary career.[4]

Even a critic equipped with the sophisticated critical apparatus of recent advances in literary theory is tempted to draw a biographical connection between 'les malheurs presques romanesques'[5] that Borel suffered during the novel's creation and the text itself. Steinmetz sees Borel's earlier work in a very Foucaldian light in his critical article 'L'Ouïe du nom'.[6] The relationship between authorial persona (the lycanthrope), text and living author is viewed as an elusive, perhaps indefinable sociological phenomenon. But concerning *Madame Putiphar*, Steinmetz follows a more concrete methodology. His essay 'Les Malheurs du récit' traces the creative and editorial difficulties that Borel faced in trying to have the work published.[7] He also speculates on the connections between Borel's personal trials and the depictions of intrigue and suffering within the work. 'Nous pouvons être certain que le livre profile une biographie (fictive ou vraie) qui est le REEL de Borel.' Thus, the enigma of *Madame Putiphar* has tempted even the most post-modern critic to adopt at times a simple and positivistic approach. Béatrice Didier has written one of the very few studies of *Madame Putiphar* that does not fall into this trap.[8] She explores the common historical intertext, and the

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[4] The critical press was largely silent on the subject of *Madame Putiphar* with the notable exception of Jules Janin. His scathing article published in the *Journal des débats* on 3 June 1839 denounced the novel as a monstrosity: '[...] cette composition funeste, déplorable, insensée, paradoxe sanglant poussé à l'excès!' As I mentioned in Ch. 1, it is quite likely that Janin wished to distance himself from the embarrassing *bousingo* excesses of his own youth.

[5] *Madame Putiphar*, p. 376. In one of his frequent asides to the reader, Borel alludes to the troubled history of the novel's creation.

[6] Steinmetz, Jean-Luc, 'L'Ouïe du nom', *Littérature*, 33, (1979), pp. 86-99.

[7] Steinmetz, Jean-Luc, 'Les Malheurs du récit' in *Madame Putiphar* (Paris: Régine Desforges, 1972), pp. 392-414.

[8] Didier, Béatrice, '*Madame Putiphar* roman sadien?' in *Madame Putiphar*, pp. VII-XX.

subsequent, common approach to Revolution, incarceration and violence in writing in the work of Borel and de Sade.

The perceived anomaly of *Madame Putiphar* extends to the work's structure and written style. Jean-Luc Steinmetz sees thematic continuity in the revolutionary fervour of the 'Patriotes' poems from *Rhapsodies*, and the final few chapters of *Madame Putiphar*, but he struggles to find other kinds of continuity, or a literary source of inspiration for the novel in Borel's previous work, and he spends little time on the subject of Borel's contemporary cultural and literary intertext. He turns instead to biographical sources or a historical intertext that is rather removed from Borel's cultural context, in order to explain the work's genesis.[9] Enid Starkie can discern no coherent plot within the novel, and thus has little to say about the relationship between Borel's earlier work and *Madame Putiphar.*[10] One can almost sense a note of disappointment in the critiques of those who see *Madame Putiphar* as betraying the promise of Borel's earlier works and of his celebrity.

Because of the biographical 'malheurs' that Borel suffered, and because of the tendency to view *Madame Putiphar* as the most spectacular failure of a missed literary career, there exists the familiar temptation among critics to fill in the gaps. I propose that *Madame Putiphar* supports a more subtle and productive line of critical scrutiny. Firstly, the novel should not be seen exclusively in the light of its critical failure. Nor should it be seen as a provisional, unfulfilled effort in a literary struggle to be resumed by the Symbolists and the Surrealists. I shall demonstrate that Borel's furious and

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[9] Steinmetz relies on the parallels drawn by Aristide Marie between the work of Borel and the anecdotal history of the Revolution of 1789 by Camille Desmoulins, *Révolutions de Flandre et de Brabant.* Steinmetz also relates the recent discovery of sources of the scenes in *Madame Putiphar* that take place within the king's harem in the *Parc-aux-Cerfs* in *Les Mémoires de Madame la Comtesse du Barri* [sic]. 'Ces mémoires étaient relativement récents et Borel y puise sans parcimonie' (Steinmetz, Jean-Luc, *Pétrus Borel, un auteur provisoire*, p. 104). The sources cited by these critics are unlikely to have influenced Borel without an intermediary. More popular adaptations of the material in these historical works was available in the 1830s. Later in this chapter, we shall discuss the important parallels between *Madame Putiphar* and the work of Balzac, de Pixerécourt and others.

[10] Starkie, Enid, *Petrus Borel, the Lycanthrope*, p. 133.

confrontational explorations of his relationship to his readership reached full, frenetic bloom in *Madame Putiphar*. Here, Borel addresses the problems that his lycanthropic project engendered. *Madame Putiphar* represents the point at which Borel comes to grips with some of the consequences of his self-destructive literary tendencies. In provoking his readership, in splintering, mutilating, and finally destroying his authorial persona, he is confronted with problems of communication and identity that are unresolveable. But an exploration of the conditions of this impasse reveals that, far from being a 'provisional' figure (to use Steinmetz's term), and a tempting 'gap', Borel was a very clear expression of the dynamic literary and philosophical currents in which he was immersed and whose course he helped sway through that same frenetic energy that led him quickly to abandon his literary career.

In *Madame Putiphar*, Borel continues his exploration of identity and the conditions of literary communication that I have discussed in the context of his previous work. In all of his work, the subjects of persecution and incarceration reflect Borel's frustration with misinterpretation of his art and his identity and intentions. Borel continues to employ the tropes of melodrama to further this exploration. Throughout *Madame Putiphar*, the principal characters, whose own tendency toward provocation doubtless contains an element of autobiography, are persecuted for the opinions they maladroitly express, and for their reluctance to betray their identities. The fatal struggles of Borel's characters mirror his own quixotic attacks upon the political and literary institutions of his age.

Madame Putiphar

Madame Putiphar is not an easy novel to read. One has the impression that Borel invented much of the story as he went along. The twists and turns and authorial

interjections are symptomatic of the energetic spontaneity of the plot in certain places; although vast stretches of the work are laboured and stiff. But the plot, if complex, *is* coherent. In fact it is almost typical when placed within its cultural context. The philosophical background, the melodramatic structure, all fit rather snugly among the scenery of political turmoil and artistic debate. Still more importantly, the novel reveals the changing nature of Borel's literary experimentation. It will be helpful to have a 'commented synopsis' before further discussion.

The novel opens with an untitled poem, perhaps Borel's most famous. The poem encapsulates Borel's ethical dilemma, and defines, perhaps more concisely than his previous work, the way in which he conceived his role as an artist. His fatalistic philosophy informs the first image:

> Une douleur renaît pour une évanouie;
> Quand un chagrin s'est éteint c'est qu'un autre est éclos;
> La vie est une ronce aux pleurs épanouie.[11]

The stanza gives an indication of the increasingly tragic plot of the novel. The poet's melancholy is exacerbated by the forces struggling within him to determine his artistic direction. He is motivated by three horsemen, representing the world, solitude and death.

> Dans ma poitrine sombre, ainsi qu'en un champ clos,
> Trois braves cavaliers se heurtent sans relâche,
> Et ces trois cavaliers, à mon être incarnés,
> Se disputent mon être, et sous leurs coups de hache
> Ma nature gémit; mais, sur ces acharnés,
> Mes plaintes ont l'effet des trompes, des timbales,
> Qui soûlent de leurs sons le plus morne soldat,
> Et le jettent joyeux sous la grêle des balles,
> Lui versant dans le cœur la rage du combat.[12]

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[11] Borel, *Madame Putiphar*, p. 3

[12] Ibid., p. 3

The artist is helpless under the influence of three contradictory impulses that form his vision of himself. The first horseman represents the world:

> Le premier cavalier est jeune, frais, alerte;
> Il porte élégamment un corselet d'acier,
> Scintillant à travers une résille verte
> Comme à travers des pins des crystaux d'un glacier,
> Son œil est amoureux; sa belle tête blonde
> A pour coiffure un casque, orné de lambrequins,
> Dont le cimier touffu l'enveloppe et l'inonde
> Comme fait le lampas autour des palanquins.
> Son cheval andalous agite un long panache
> Et va caracolant sous ses étriers d'or,
> Quand il fait rayonner sa dague et sa rondache
> Avec l'agilité d'un vain toréador.[13]

He is the allure of fashion and the distraction of vanity that so haunted Borel's authorial persona in *Rhapsodies*. The first horseman draws the artist to society; he represents not only the artist's responsibility to his public, but also the material concerns and the hazards of reception and criticism that were a poisoned chalice for Borel.

The second horseman is a monk, who embodies solitude and the devotion of the artist to his work.

> [...] c'est un pénitent, un moine, dans sa robe
> Traînante enseveli, voilé d'un capuchon,
> Qui pour se vendre au Ciel ici-bas se dérobe;
> Béat sur la vertu très à califourchon.[14]

He beckons the artist to leave the 'songes enivrants', the 'monde menteur', and to embrace austerity.

The final horseman is death. He also represents the negativity of Borel's dark irony. He is the destructive, disillusioning force behind Borel's literature. Additionally, he is the principle that finalises all moral arguments in Borel's literary universe:

> Niveleur éternel, implacable faucheur,

[13] Ibid., p. 3.

[14] Ibid., p. 4.

C'est la Mort, le Néant!...D'une voix souterraine
Il m'appelle sans cesse: - Enfant , descends chez moi,
Enfant, plonge en mon sein, car la douleur est reine
De la terre maudite, et l'opprobre en est roi![15]

Shame and indignity are the only certainties in the world. The artist is entreated to embrace death to avoid the pain and chaos of an uncertain and inclement destiny. Symbolically, this image relates to the irony inherent in Champavert's literary suicide, and in the invocation of death as a form of vengeance upon the reader who has helped to create a 'terre maudite' in which 'opprobre' reigns.

Borel is, then, torn between three propositions: to devote himself to becoming a popular author; to devote himself exclusively to the work without consideration for material needs; or to devote himself to the negative irony that serves his vengeance upon an uncomprehending and ill-willed public, but which is, in the end, also self-destructive. The poem contains something of the *spleen* and *idéal* that formed the core dichotomy of Baudelaire's artistic identity, but Borel's imagery is grounded much more concretely in his literary, rhetorical project than it is in more spiritual concerns. The poem ends on an ambiguous note:

Ainsi, depuis longtemps, s'entrechoque et se taille
Cet infernal trio, -ces trois fiers spadassins:
Ils ont pris- les méchants pour leur champ de bataille,
Mon pauvre cœur, meurtri sous leurs coups assassins,
Mon pauvre cœur navré, qui s'affaisse et se broie,
Douteur, religieux, fou, mondain, mécréant!
Quand finira la lutte, et qui m'aura pour proie,-
Dieu le sait! -du Désert, du Monde ou du Néant?[16]

At this point in his career, Borel questions the development of his artistic identity more acutely than ever before. As we shall see, *Madame Putiphar* represents a remarkable metamorphosis of his previously ironic, destructive position.

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[15] Ibid., p. 6.

[16] Ibid., p. 7.

The novel itself begins in Ireland. The Celtic and medieval decor are typical of Romantic literature of Borel's generation and find their roots in the very beginnings of the Romantic movement.[17] In his work *Ossian en France*, Van Tieghem describes briefly the reactions of writers within Borel's circle to the vogue of Celtic history and lyricism. Gautier ignored the fashion, and Nerval rejected Ossianism, calling instead for an exploration of national, French heritage in literature.[18] Not surprisingly, it was Sainte-Beuve who referred frequently to the Celtic vein of Romanticism.[19] Borel shared more with Sainte-Beuve, including the premise of pseudonymy and the premature death of his literary alter-ego, than he did with most of his literary comrades. The *jeunes-France* themselves were little affected by the vogue for Celtic art, except in the case of Borel. In *Madame Putiphar*, he concentrated on portraying the struggles of his Irish characters to maintain a sense of identity in the face of violent suppression in Ireland by its English colonisers. For Borel, primitivism and Ossianism were never entirely without political connotations:

> Si le plus grand soin d'un tyran est de niveler les aspérités nationales et locales qui enrayent les roues de son char, le premier soin aussi d'une nation qui se réveille, d'une nation qui s'essaye à briser ses fers, est de reprendre ses dehors primitifs : ainsi les Moréotes évoquèrent jusqu'à leur nom d'Hellènes.[20]

Nevertheless, Borel's political commentary never extended very far beyond the context of art, literature and language. His preoccupation with archaisms of language, and with the perceived purity and primitivism of the Celtic language, link his work with the philosophy of Joseph de Maistre. Like de Maistre, Borel felt that language had been corrupted by modern institutions. In addition to his imaginative orthography, and his

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[17] Macpherson's fictional presentation of the work of Ossian exercised a strong influence on authors from the end of the 18th century through the 1840s. See Van Tieghem, P., *Ossian en France*, 2 vols. (Paris: F. Rieder et Cie., 1917).

[18] Van Tieghem, op. cit., p. 350.

[19] Ibid., pp. 351-3.

[20] Borel, *Madame Putiphar*, p. 30.

fascination with archaic usage and grammar, Borel often intercalated Irish place names, or nonsensical expressions into the dialogue of his characters, hoping to evoke an image of the primitive or medieval integrity of the Irish. Patrick, the hero of the story, prays for salvation in Celtic at that moment in the plot when divine intervention seems least likely: 'O thiarna dean trocaire ormsa mor-pheacach!'[21] In the section of this chapter devoted to the philosophical background of *Madame Putiphar*, I will briefly discuss Borel's borrowings from eighteenth-century theories of language, and particularly from the philosophy of history and language of de Maistre.

The plot of *Madame Putiphar* follows the sorrowful misadventures of Déborah, daughter of Lord Cockermouth, a cruel and gluttonous English landowner in Ireland, and her lover Patrick, the son of one of Cockermouth's farm labourers. The medieval decor and the tyranny of Lord Cockermouth described at the beginning of the work are among the scenes that Baudelaire felt were 'véritablement épique[s]' in their grotesqueness:[22]

> Lord Cockermouth avoit tous les dehors d'un vrai pourceau d'Epicure. Quoique grand, il étoit d'une circonférence inconnue sur le Continent : deux hommes n'auroient pu l'entourer de leurs bras. Sa panse retomboit comme une outre énorme et lui battoit les jambes : il y avoit bien quinze ans qu'il ne s'étoit vu les genoux. Sa tête, tout à fait dans le type anglois, sembloit une caboche de poupard monstrueux. La distance de sa lèvre supérieure à son nez, court et retroussé, étoit hideusement démesurée, et son menton informe se noyoit dans une collerette de graisse. Il avoit le visage violet, la peau adjuste et rissolée, les yeux petits et entrebaîllés; et suoit le *roastbeef*, le vin et l'*ale* par tous les pores. En un mot, cette lourde bulbe humaine se mouvant encore avec assez d'aisance et d'énergie, étoit un de ces polypes charnus, un de ces gigantesques zoophytes fongueux et spongieux, indigènes de la Grande-Bretagne.[23]

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[21] Ibid., p. 349.

[22] Baudelaire, Charles, 'Réflexions sur quelques-uns de mes contemporains' in *OC*, vol. II, pp. 153-56. 'Pétrus Borel [...] avait montré un talent véritablement épique dans plusieurs scènes de sa *Madame Putiphar* (particulièrement dans les scènes du début, où est peinte l'ivrognerie sauvage et septentrionale du père de l'héroïne; dans celle où le cheval favori rapporte à la mère jadis violée, mais toujours pleine de la haine de son déshonneur, le cadavre de son bien-aimé fils, du pauvre Vengeance, le courageux adolescent tombé au premier choc, et qu'elle avait si soigneusement eduqué pour la vengeance; enfin, dans la peinture des hideurs et des tortures du cachot, qui monte jusqu'à la vigueur de Maturin.'

[23] *Madame Putiphar*, p. 41.

Lord Cockermouth guards his daughter jealously. He hates Patrick, and plots to have him murdered. By accident, his henchman attacks Déborah, who is disguised in a cloak, and almost kills her. To escape the persecution of her father, Patrick and Déborah flee to France. Patrick enlists in the musketeers with the help of a bishop of Irish ancestry.

The Marquis Gave de Villepastour, colonel and head of the musketeers, at first takes Patrick under his wing, but quickly shows an unhealthy interest in Déborah, now Patrick's wife. To complicate matters, Patrick runs foul of a jealous and rash young Irishman in his company, Patrick Fitz-Harris. Fitz-Harris spreads the news that in Ireland, Lord Cockermouth has pressed charges against Patrick for the disappearance, and presumed murder, of his daughter.

The subsequent long narration of Patrick's and Déborah's persecution and imprisonment echoes two important works of Borel's epoch: the memoirs of Henri Masers de Latude, and Guilbert de Pixerécourt's dramatisation of the same story (I describe the play in detail in Appendix III).[24] Fitz-Harris is arrested for having sung seditious verses mocking Madame Putiphar (a thinly veiled caricature of Madame de Pompadour). Despite Fitz-Harris's previous calumny, Patrick comes to his aid. He asks the Marquis de Villepastour for assistance and finally supplicates before Madame Putiphar for Fitz-Harris's release. Madame Putiphar is struck both by Patrick's beauty and his good-will. After two interviews, she grants him the release, and invites him to dine with her at Trianon the following evening. The plot development of the scenes in Paris follows Pixerécourt's play. Like Patrick, Latude is arrested by Madame de Pompadour at Trianon while attempting to aid Dalègre, a similar character to Fitz-Harris. Dalègre was arrested for writing verses that mocked de Pompadour.

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[24] See *Latude, ou trente cinq ans de captivité* in de Pixerécourt, Guilbert, *Théâtre choisi*, and Masers de Latude, Henri, *Mémoires de Henri Masers de Latude* 2 vols. (Paris: Desenne et Denné, 1793).

The Marquis de Villepastour and the other members of the musketeers rapidly lose sympathy with Patrick. Superficially, they are all jealous of his moral rectitude, and they are not necessarily happy to see the tactless and loose-tongued Fitz-Harris out of prison. Moreover, Villepastour's schemes to seduce Déborah fail miserably. She is as unswervingly moral as her husband. Villepastour decides to take out his frustrations on Patrick, and at the same time to remove what he sees as the only stumbling block in his conquest of Déborah.

Madame Putiphar attempts to seduce Patrick during their dinner. He rejects and admonishes her, and in her fury Madame Putiphar has him thrown out of the palace. But not before Patrick, in a fit of self-righteous indignation, seizes the opportunity to seal his fate, and those of Déborah and Fitz-Harris. He takes a volume of *La Nouvelle Héloise* and recites the line: 'La femme d'un charbonnier est plus estimable que la maîtresse d'un roi.'[25] Despite the pretence of moral righteousness, there is a strong element of Borelian provocation. Patrick is a character with little psychological dimension, and few emotional shades between rapture in his self-conscious altruism, and provocative and furious indignation.

Following the disastrous dinner, Villepastour and Putiphar collude on the best means to dispose of Patrick, Fitz-Harris and Déborah.

The remaining two-thirds of the novel contain the most interesting thematic and philosophical substance. There follows a long history of torment and incarceration that incorporates most of the material viewed by Didier as Sadean. Fitz-Harris and Patrick are imprisoned in Bicêtre, then transferred to the dungeon of Vincennes where they live in austere but comfortable surroundings until the arrival of the Chevalier de Rougemont as prison governor. A dishonest and vengeful warden, Rougemont cuts back on the

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[25] Borel, *Madame Putiphar*, p.130.

prisoners' rations of food, firewood and any other necessities, turning an immense profit by selling what is not used.

Typically, Patrick stands up to the governor, and his polemical and long-winded moralising aggravates de Rougemont's cruelty. Consequently, he and Fitz-Harris are subject to the most horrible tortures of neglect, malnutrition and disease. Borel goes to great lengths to describe in minute and graphic detail their mental anguish and physical degradation. Fitz-Harris contracts a virulent infection. His upper body is emaciated, but his legs are bloated and covered in pustules. In his weakened state, he cannot defend himself from the rats that threaten to eat him slowly alive. There is a measure of Sadean excess in Borel's enumeration of the their tortures.

At the same time, Déborah is imprisoned in Pharaon's (ie. the king's) personal seraglio in the Parc aux Cerfs. There, she is subject to varied and unceasing sexual predations. Her room is decorated in pornographic prints and statuettes. The lesbian overseer of the seraglio constantly works with enticements and lies to soften Déborah's resolve to remain chaste. As in other parts of the novel, particularly the gruesome prison scenes, the artistic quality of the work is superseded by Borel's apparent desire to titillate and shock his reader. The sexual degradation of Déborah and the tortures of Fitz-Harris and Patrick are repulsively fascinating. The strongest link between the work of Sade and Borel exists in these passages:

> [...] il y a dans la douleur une volupté mystérieuse dont le malheureux est avide; car la souffrance est savoureuse comme le bonheur.[26]

Furthermore, the arbitrariness of the victim's imprisonment, and the fickle cruelty of Putiphar and de Rougement, are as much sexual expressions as they are political

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[26] Ibid., p. 299.

symbols. There is indeed a strong and unsubtle correlation between the social body, and the eroticised body of the victim.[27]

Pharaon attempts to rape Déborah. Previous critics have supposed that he succeeds, though the scene is in no way explicit. Déborah fights him to the last. Whatever the outcome, it obviously offers little satisfaction to the monarch. In the chapter following the attempted rape, Pharaon is in a black mood. He explains to his mistress, Putiphar, that he is tired of the burdens of the throne. She suspects some underlying and simple cause, and finally coaxes him to admit that his mood is due to his frustrated attempts at sex with Déborah: 'Elle savait que j'étais le Roi, et elle m'a repoussé et m'a maudit.'[28] The scene not only illustrates Pharaon's tyranny and presumed impotence; it also reveals the degree to which he is motivated by whim, and easily manipulated by Putiphar.

Unsuitable, then, for the king's harem, Déborah is sent to the island prison of Sainte-Marguerite. Borel develops the striking contrast between the philosophies of incarceration and punishment in practice in the state prisons of Paris, and on the island of Sainte-Marguerite. On the island, the prisoners are free to move about, and live a monastic and isolated life of relative comfort. But the atmosphere encourages personal reflection on the sources of their guilt. This material draws heavily on the theories of Ballanche, the philosopher and critic, whose work, *La Ville des expiations*, contains numerous and striking parallels with the scenes on Sainte-Marguerite.[29] (Ballanche enjoyed a great deal of popularity among, and exercised an important influence on, the

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[27] For further discussion of this subject in reference to Sade, see 'Corps érotique, corps social: désordre et rituel' in Frappier-Mazur, Lucien, *Sade et l'écriture de l'orgie* (Poitiers: Edition Nathan, 1991). The subject of Sade and Borel has been treated thoroughly in Didier's article.

[28] Borel, *Madame Putiphar*, p. 191.

[29] Ballanche, Pierre-Georges, *La Ville des Expiations* (Paris: Bibliothèque romantique, 1926).

generation of 1830, but fell out of fashion like Borel and has been largely ignored in this century).

Déborah escapes from Sainte-Marguerite and returns to Paris in search of Patrick. She does not find him, and so retires to a small castle on the outskirts of the city, where she devotes her time to raising the son with whom she became pregnant shortly before Patrick's arrest. She names the child Vengeance, and trains him in medieval, noble arts. He has little education apart from that provided by the fencing master and the local peasants, but grows strong from physical activity, and develops a hardy and generous spirit, which is implicitly due to his remoteness from society. Vengeance is in frequent communion with nature, and Borel stresses the development of certain ancestral traits in the young man. Much of the novel hinges upon Vengeance's inevitably tragic demise, and his expiation of the trans-generational *guignon* that has plagued both Déborah's and Patrick's families. Vengeance's serene childhood anticipates a gruesome fate, similar to that which befell his parents.

There is also a strong hint of incest in his relationship with his mother. Déborah replaces the lost Patrick with Vengeance, but his name implies a hidden motive in the care that she devotes to his upbringing. Nevertheless, Déborah is mysteriously reluctant to explain to Vengeance the circumstances surrounding the disappearance and assumed death of his father. Assuming that he is a bastard, Vengeance reflects that his legitimacy must come from the sword.

> [...] je suis bâtard! bâtard! bâtard! Tant mieux, ma mère! Une épée! et ce monde qui me rejette sera rempli de moi! Une épée! et l'on se courbera sous mon pas, et je légitimerai ma race dans le sang légitime des vaincus![30]

[30]Ibid., p. 329.

Absolution for the supposed crimes committed against his mother, and legitimation of his race, can only be brought about through bloodshed. This pivotal avowal by Vengeance encapsulates a large portion of the morality, both overt and occult, of the entire novel, and shares something with Joseph de Maistre's theories of the expiatory power of blood.[31] For it becomes clear in the later stages of the novel that Borel is not necessarily writing about individual characters. The popular, melodramatic form of the work not only implies the accessibility of the work to a wide audience, but also moves the focus of the drama away from the psychological portraits of individual characters, decidedly the work's weakest point. The interest of the work lies in the thematics and dynamics of the plot structures: imprisonment, revolution, expiation, legitimacy. In this context we shall find Borel re-working the issues of morality, interpretation and artistic reception of his previous work into a grander historical and sociological scheme.

Déborah's hesitation to reveal the fate of his father piques Vengeance's curiosity, and after much goading, she shows him the shrine to Patrick that she has constructed in a hidden room of the castle. She recounts the entire story of their persecution and of his disappearance. Furious, Vengeance races off in search of his father's killer.

The following scenes were also cited by Baudelaire as evidence of Borel's prodigious but uneven talent.[32] The black humour and irony of which Borel is capable are nowhere better expressed than in the simultaneously grandiose and pathetic recounting of Vengeance's death at the hands of Villepastour. Vengeance arrives at Villepastour's château, and is greeted by the Marquis's wife, who is immediately taken with the young man's beauty and noble bearing. The Marquise directs Vengeance to the garden, where he encounters Villepastour. There is an element of frivolous and exotic cruelty in the person and the retinue of the Marquis. He chases and worries a butterfly

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[31]See below, pp. 199-206.

[32]Baudelaire, *OC*, vol. II, p. 154.

with the point of his sword. One of his valets leads a monkey on the end of a long silver chain. The monkey is dressed in an elaborate velvet costume, and messily devours figs from a basket fixed to its neck.

Vengeance leaps from his horse, and challenges the Marquis. There is a darkly humorous contrast between the cruel nonchalance of Villepastour, and the barely contained rage of Vengeance. After a heated exchange, during which the Marquis's feigned incomprehension serves only to exacerbate Vengeance's anger, Vengeance attacks the Marquis. With a sigh, Villepastour turns to his valet and exclaims, '--Tu vois, Jasmin, que monsieur m'y oblige.'[33] It is clear that Villepastour consciously provokes Vengeance in order to be able to claim self-defence.

There follows a long and heated duel. Vengeance attacks 'comme un lion', but the Marquis is an accomplished swordsman, and there is no clear advantage until the moment when the Marquise discovers them upon entering the garden. Terrified, she cries out and throws herself between the combattants, trying to protect Vengeance. Unfortunately, a wild blow by the Marquis pierces the Marquise's fan and impales the stunned Vengeance.

> Une botte portée trop brutalement par M. le marquis, et qu'il ne put modérer, se fit jour sous le fer de son ennemi, lui cloua sur la poitrine l'éventail d'ivoire de la marquise dont elle s'efforcait de faire un bouclier, lui perça le coeur, et s'insinua sous le poids du bras jusques à la garde.[34]

Vengeance cries out, 'O ma mère!' and falls dead. The Marquise throws herself on his body and screams at her husband. Among the emotion and chaos, the Marquis turns to his valet:

> 'Jasmin, dit là-dessus M. le marquis, sans aucune marque d'altération ni de trouble, -- j'ai la main meilleure encore que je ne pensois.'[35]

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[33]Borel, *Madame Putiphar*, p. 339.

[34]Ibid., p. 339.

[35]Ibid.

Vengeance dies as a result of the pressures of maternal instinct. Though reluctant to tell him of his past, Déborah obviously raised Vengeance for that moment when he could legitimise his birth, claim his place in society, and avenge his parents. In addition, the protective impulse of the Marquise catches him unaware, and he is unable to defend himself from the fatal thrust. His final words, 'O ma mère!' are ambiguous. Does he cry out to his mother in disappointment for having failed? Is it an expression of anguish at the fate for which she so carefullly prepared him? There is a shade of each of these sentiments in his final words. Similar to the portrait of the death of Champavert's child, the pressures of society, the fears and expectations of the parents, all lead inevitably to the death of the child/creation.

Later that evening, Jasmin and the Marquis clean up the blood, and tie Vengeance's lifeless body to his horse. They then strike the animal, and it runs terrified into the night. The corpse's limbs slap the horse as it runs, and terrify the animal further, provoking it to greater speed, which increases the violent motion of the limp body. The hideous spectacle elicits darkly humorous observations from Jasmin and the Marquis:

> Bonne chance, mon drôle! En voilà un du moins, cher maître, qui, voyageant à dos de mulet, ne craint pas qu'on lui prenne ou la bourse ou la vie.[36]

Again, their humour and nonchalance contrast sharply with the grisly spectacle. The Marquis compares the strange sight of Vengeance's body to the story of Mazeppa.[37]

At this point in the book, Borel the narrator intervenes. Misery has been heaped upon misery for the protagonists. Toward what end could the reader possibly expect such

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[36] Ibid., p. 340.

[37] The sources of Vengeance's death scenes lie in the legend of the death of Mazeppa, depicted variously in the painting by Boulanger (1827) and in the thirty-fourth poem of Hugo's *Les Orientales*. The particular depiction of the dead man carried limp on the back of his horse is common to all three portraits, but the idea for the story of Vengeance's upbringing and death bears strong resemblance to an anecdote in Ballanche's *La Ville des expiations*, that I shall examine at the end of this chapter.

a convoluted and cruel narrative to be working? The tight and familiar narrative structure of melodramatic literature does not apply. As easily as to melodrama, one could compare the growing list of atrocities and injustices that the novel compiles to Sade's *Les cent-vingt journées de Sodome*. But, suddenly, in the sixty-third chapter, directly following the death and ignominious horse-ride of Vengeance, Borel breaks down and confesses his doubts and fears about his novel to the reader:

> Quand je pris la plume pour écrire ce livre j'avois l'esprit plein de doutes, plein de négations, plein d'erreurs;-- je voulais asseoir sur le trône un mensonge, -- un faux roi! Comme le peuple, sujet à la démence, pose quelquefois le diadème impérial sur un front dérisoire, et que devroit plutôt fleurdelyser le fer rouge du bourreau, je voulois ceindre du bandeau sacré une idée coupable, lui mettre une robe de pourpre, lui verser sur le chef les saintes huiles [...][38]

This passage serves as a presage for the ideas that Borel will reveal on both literary creation (particularly his relationship to his public), and on political uprising. Remarkably, this metaphor continues for two pages. Borel compares the dispelling of his own mysterious delusion to the melting of frost that had once obscured a clear window; to a once muddied stream where now flows a pure, icy current; to a lake into which he has plunged to gaze upon schools of silvery fish; to a sluggish boat that has suddenly opened all of its sails.

> Le brouillard s'est déchiré, et la cîme des monts, pareille à une armure gigantesque dorée par les flammes du soleil, au fond de la gerçure ouverte dans la brume, s'est offerte à mes yeux.[39]

Is there a touch of humorous provocation in this list of overdone metaphors? The reader is obviously curious at this point about Borel's supposedly earth-shattering revelation, but the narrator prolongs the suspense with an aggravatingly long list of hackneyed images. It is several pages before Borel reveals his sociological moral schema for the

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[38]Borel, *Madame Putiphar*, p. 341.

[39] Ibid.

work, but at this point, the reader's attention must be waning. Like his character Patrick, Borel has trouble setting the appropriate tone. There is little moderation or nuance, and when Borel appears to want to touch his reader most directly, he cannot help but provoke him.

In this verbose aside, the reader encounters - not for the first time - the characteristic so distinct in Borel's writing that Baudelaire described as a curse:

> Quel méchant esprit se pencha sur son berceau et lui dit: *Je te défends de plaire*?
> [...]
> Je n'ai pas d'explication positive à donner; je ne puis indiquer que des symptômes, symptômes d'une nature morbide, amoureuse de la contradiction pour la contradiction, et toujours prête à remonter tous les courans, sans en calculer la force, non plus que sa force propre.[40]

Nowhere in Borel's work is this citation more appropriate than in the context of *Madame Putiphar*. Why this sudden and awkward reversal? Borel might have given himself free rein in applying his whim for grotesque and outrageous description throughout most of the novel, but then felt the sudden and almost inexplicable need to tighten up the plot by tacking on a retroactive philosophical framework at the last moment. Or, conversely, *Madame Putiphar* may follow a similar plot structure to the short stories, albeit one lacking the concision and force that characterised *Champavert*. He may have consciously saved the moment of philosophical revelation for the very end, and hoped to bring with it the sort of drama inherent to the stunning and disillusioning anti-climaxes that we have seen in 'Monsieur de l'Argentière' or 'Dina la belle juive'. In either case, the intention is ambiguous and the outcome maladroit, but it is conceivable and even probable that Borel consciously postponed the moral resolution to *Madame Putiphar* as he had done with the short stories. In this instance, Borel's dramatic expostulations in the sixty-third chapter are tinged with an ironic and black humour:

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[40] Baudelaire, Charles, *OC*, vol. II, pp. 153-54.

> Non! les méchants ne triomphent pas sur la terre!-- Non, sur la terre chacun reçoit le salaire de ses oeuvres.
> Non, il n'y a pas besoin d'une seconde vie pour redresser les torts de la première, -- pour faire la part du juste, et refaire la part du méchant. --Rien d'ici-bas ne demeure impuni!
> Non, il n'y a point de désordre dans le gouvernement du monde!
> Non, les bons ne payent point pour les mauvais, -- la vertu pour le vice!
> Non, il n'y a point d'hommes qui soient donnés en proie aux hommes sans que Dieu n'en ait la raison.[41]

The irony lies in the fact that this promised melodramatic settling of accounts at the plot's conclusion never occurs in the conventional form. The reader would anticipate from these comments a gruesome death for the villains, and complete exoneration and a reward for the persecuted. Instead, Borel abruptly shifts the context of the work. In chapters sixty-three through sixty-six, he reveals that he is no longer discussing individual problems of persecution and redemption, but a larger problem of the role of individual suffering in historical evolution:

> Lorsque le vase de la colère de Dieu est plein, une larme de femme, -- et le vase déborde!
> Le roi Don Rodrigue força Florinde, et il perdit l'Espagne!
> Pharaon força Déborah, et il perdit la France![42]

With this shift in mind, I will argue that the structure of the novel is not incongruous with the structure of the short stories. Following the synopsis, I will provide further evidence that *Madame Putiphar* develops the problems with irony and with the artist's relationship with his readership that Borel had begun to explore in his earlier work. The novel adumbrates an expected ending, which never materialises, because the actual settling of accounts and *dénouement* involve moral arbitration of a crueller sort and on a larger scale than one could practically anticipate. The 'ogre appelé Dieu' that we have seen in the philosophical musings of a poem like 'Rêveries' comes in to decide the fate of the players in Borel's chaotic historical drama:

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[41]Borel, *Madame Putiphar*, p. 344.

[42]Ibid., p. 345.

> Autour de moi voyez la foule sourcilleuse
> S'ameuter, du néant son haut coeur est marri. --
> Dites de ce vieux chêne où va le tronc pourri?
> Poudre grossir la glèbe.-- Et vous souche orgueilleuse!
> Un ogre appelé Dieu vous garde un autre sort![43]

Borel, as we have seen, returns often to descriptions of insurrection, and to the occult forces and self-destructive impulses of riotous crowds.

In the final chapters of *Madame Putiphar*, Borel gives an account of the discontent and uprisings that gave way to the Revolution of 1789. This portrait is fed not only by images of the recent Revolution of 1830, but by Borel's experience with the chaotic and explosive growth of journalism and political and literary criticism, and by the strife within the literary world that this growth engendered. Borel's view of group dynamics, in the forms of both political and literary movements, always involves some element of self-destruction. In his literary criticism, he writes of the deeply harmful strife between the critic, public and author, and in terms of politics, he describes the movement of the Revolutionary masses turning upon themselves:

> Des philosophes étoient déjà suscités, et le peuple déjà buvoit avidement le venin qu'ils suintoient;-- La France, assise alors sur son arrière-train comme une bête vorace, fouilloit déjà du museau dans ses propres entrailles et se mâchoit le coeur![44]

Within this system, Borel's well-meaning protagonists act as barometers of popular discontent; they suffer the tyrannies of an ill-conceived penal system which acts as a metaphor for the larger system of government. The extent of their debasement foreshadows the fury to be unleashed by the Revolution. Déborah is broken at the death of her son. Fitz-Harris dies a gruesome and ignoble death in prison. Patrick must bury him with his own hands under the cruel gaze of Rougemont, who compares the death of a

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[43] Borel, *Rhapsodies*, p. 98.

[44] Borel, *Madame Putiphar*, p. 345.

prisoner to that of a dog! (The allusion back to the shocking and disillusioning conclusion of 'Dina, la belle juive' is clear.) The injustices portrayed in these final chapters before the description of the beginnings of the Revolution approach a sort of incoherence. With the death of Fitz-Harris and Vengeance, Borel has yet to reveal his moralising scheme for the work. With each step in the descent toward hopelessness, a satisfying resolution grows less and less likely. And conversely, allusions to incoherence and madness grow more frequent.

Under the apparently irreversible and tragic conditions that develop in the second half of the book, there is a strong focus upon the condition of language and its degradation with the onset of madness. Borel juxtaposes descriptions of the consequences of the unbearable suffering of Déborah and particularly of Patrick, and of the amorphous, hate-driven and 'senseless' movements of the revolutionary masses. All hope has been driven from Patrick and Déborah. What little hope of freedom and reunion that appeared toward the end of the novel is extinguished quickly. After the death of Fitz-Harris, Patrick sinks into despondency and begins to show the first signs of losing his mind. Borel describes Patrick's madness as aphasia, inability to speak. He can no longer express the hope of a happy ending to his struggle. He has lost contact with the deity and with the literary images of his wife and of his homeland that supported him throughout his incarceration. Patrick is only capable of chanting a single Celtic phrase: 'O thiarna dean trocaire ormsa mor-pheacach!'[45] The words mean 'O Lord, take pity on me, poor sinner!' but within the context, chanted like a mantra, they are a cry of incoherent despair. The reader would be hard pressed to find a translation into French from the Celtic. Borel provides no translation. The phrase may as well be gibberish. There is dark humour and a strong irony in Patrick's repeated invocation of a deity who is apparently blind to his suffering; the point at which he can no longer express himself

[45]Ibid., p. 349.

except through this phrase corresponds to the point at which the moral framework of the novel appears to have unravelled.

Indeed, the entire plot of the novel at this moment moves toward incoherence. There is no overarching meaning or morality apparent to Patrick in his suffering, and the noise and movement of the Revolutionary mob is equally without visible cause or direction. In addition, Borel appears to have lost the sense of momentum of his plot. The authorial asides, and the inflated and dramatic rhetoric through which he invokes revolution and expiation, detract from the previously swift and sequential descriptions of systematic degradation that his protragonists suffer. Thus, the intradiegetic moral framework has fallen apart (the main characters suffer horribly with no hope of satisfactory moral resolution in sight.) And the extra-diegetic moral contract, between reader and author, also dissolves. Indeed, Borel even awkwardly interrupts the momentum of his story to confess his errors in constructing a plot that contains no proper morality. As in the previous citation, he apologises to the reader for having embraced 'un mensonge'.

The rapid change of narrative pacing, and the authorial digressions may be tiresome for the ordinary reader, but they do reveal the strength of the narrative and aesthetic links between *Madame Putiphar* and Borel's previous work, as the occult vengeance of a hidden and cruel deity becomes the sole force motivating the plot from the sixty-third chapter and onward, and as the protagonists lose all will to extricate themselves from the accelerating spiral of agony and degradation in which they have been participating throughout the book. Borel invokes with a dark glee the approaching cataclysm:

> Patience! encore quelques jours... Et quand nous descendrons notre seau dans le puits, il remontera plein de sang! Et quand nous chercherons une pierre pour reposer notre front, ou notre vieux pere pour le guider dans les ténèbres, notre main ne rencontrera partout que des poitrines ouvertes et des têtes coupées!...[46]

[46] Ibid., p. 349.

Borel finally promises a concrete moralising conclusion: 'L'heure du châtiment approchoit donc!'[47] Fore-knowledge of the impending carnage is the only thing that sustains the narrative momentum at this point. The reader anticipates a speedy descent into the 'étrange saturnale' of revolution.

In the following chapters, Borel recounts the storming of the Bastille and the freeing of political prisoners. The descriptions are remarkable for a number of reasons. There is little heroism or noble purpose among the mob of bloodthirsty revolutionaries, even if some fortuitous and just results occur from the storming of the Bastille. In addition, Borel describes the revolutionary crowd as both self-destructive and falsely self-motivating. Myths of injustice, hunger and repression circulate among the rebellious, growing and being distorted with each re-telling until the crowd has whipped itself into an animal-like frenzy:

> Le peuple, poussé par les suggestions d'une misère prétendue plus profonde par les suggestions d'une faim factice et par d'autres suggestions plus ténébreuses et plus terribles encore, se faisoit de plus en plus actif et indocile. Sa chaîne cassée et sa muselière arrachée pendante au col, il rôdoit sans repos nuit et jour comme un dogue échappé, ou comme un loup au Désert, qui cherche le lieu d'un meurtre pour s'ébaudir dans le sang.[48]

Obviously, hunger and repression were very real, as we know from others' descriptions of popular suffering prior to the Revolution of 1789. But what is remarkable about Borel's portrayal of the Revolution is the way he depicts the interior dynamics of the insurrectional crowd. There is something in this description that is evocative of the suspicion with which Borel viewed his reading public. His description of crowds invariably focuses upon the circulation and distortion of ideas, and upon the capacity of a

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[47] Ibid., p. 350.

[48] Ibid., p. 353.

crowd for auto-suggestion and the spontaneous eruption of distorted images and emotions.

Thus, Borel focuses upon instances of confusion and gratuitous cruelty in his description of the storming of the Bastille. The crowd of revolutionaries seizes the innocent daughter of the Bastille governor and threatens to burn her alive. Brigands take advantage of the chaos to murder and pilfer the unarmed and unsuspecting. Innocent or guilty, noblemen in the vicinity of the prison are dragged into the streets and literally torn apart by the ferocious mob. The villain Villepastour meets a gruesome death, as recounted in a following chapter in which Déborah's mourning for her son is broken by the arrival of a letter, read aloud by her valet:

> [...]M. le marquis Gave de Villepastour, ci-devant capitaine-colonel des mousquetaires du feu Roi, et si connu pour son insolence envers la classe la plus honorable des citoyens, ce qu'il appeloit la canaille, fut arrêté, et, comme il étoit porteur de papiers qui sembloient le compromettre, amené par quelques braves et quelques *soldats de la patrie* à l'Hôtel de Ville. Là, au moment où il débouchoit du quai sur la grève, la foule, guidée par cette intelligence qui jamais ne lui défaillit, se précipita sur le carrosse de ce privilégié du despotisme, le renversa et le brûla sur la place. Quant à M. le marquis, comme on le pense bien, son compte fut court et bon; en un clin d'oeil il fut arraché de sa chaise, pendu à cette potence de lanterne devenue depuis si célèbre, dépendu et livré enfin à la fureur de ces hommes de courage (qu'on s'efforce en vain de flétrir du nom de Cannibales), qui l'éventrèrent, lui tirèrent le coeur de la poitrine, lui tranchèrent la tête et la portèrent au bout d'une pique, afin que ce grand exemple allât répandre de toutes parts un effroi salutaire [...][49]

The crowd is propelled by the malevolent, self-consuming destiny that lies behind all of Borel's literary work. The revolutionaries are compared to cannibals. The irony of such phrases as 'la foule, guidée par cette intelligence qui jamais ne lui défaillit', and 'hommes de courage' cannot be missed. The crowd is guided by the same 'intelligence' that led to popular persecution of Don Andréa Vésalius, or Three-Fingered Jack.

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[49] Ibid., p. 368.

Patrick is found by the marauding crowds in some forgotten *basse-fosse* of the Bastille. The crowd takes him from his cell, but does not grant him his freedom. Instead, he is paraded through the city as an exhibition of the extent of the cruelty of the *ancien régime.* Borel describes Patrick as reduced to an animal state; his hair and beard are long and matted; his nails have grown long and filthy, 'avec des ongles comme un lion'; through deprivation, he is reduced to little more than a skeleton. He cannot speak, nor is he apparently aware of the meaning of the tumultuous events around him. He shows no awareness of his liberty, and is only able to repeat an occasional and meaningless phrase in Celtic. The once noble and primitive Celt, exposed to the swiftly-moving and treacherous political climate of Paris, has become a beast. Patrick is the point at which the primitive psychology of melodramatic characterisation, Borel's medievalism, and the persecution and subsequent animalism of the lycanthrope come together in one fatally destined character.

News of his release quickly reaches Déborah. After questioning innumerable officers, magistrates and public record keepers, Deborah and her valet are finally directed to the lunatic asylum run by the monks of Charenton. There, Déborah asks after Patrick. One of the monks tells her that it would be difficult to choose one man to fit her description among the many wretches who arrived at Charenton after losing their minds in neglected and sombre state prisons and being 'liberated'. A host of beast-like men are paraded before Déborah. Each one is filthy, and displays some debilitating physical ailment born of cruelty and neglect. Finally, her gaze settles upon 'un homme presque entièrement nu, d'une maigreur excessive', between whose abundant and filthy hair two bright and staring eyes shine.[50] Despite his apparent misery, he retains a hint of his former, noble bearing. Déborah recognises him after a few seconds' hesitation and cries out his name. Patrick is catatonic. He shows no sign of recognition, and Déborah, in her

[50] Ibid., p. 375.

despair, throws herself at his feet and screams out his name. In reply, Patrick repeats in an emotionless voice, 'O thiarna, dean trocaire ormsa morpheacach', the Celtic mantra that has come to symbolise his aphasia and madness.[51] The monk explains to Déborah that Patrick has been catatonic since his arrival, acknowledging no one and hopelessly mad. Déborah repeats the word 'fou' slowly to herself, then, with a terrible cry, falls to the floor sobbing. With a guttural moan, she dies suddenly. 'La douleur l'avoit tuée...--Elle étoit morte!'[52]

Here ends the narrative, but in the final chapter, Borel again addresses his reader directly, and reveals his regrets and expectations for his work. This strangely candid epilogue reveals as much as the prefaces to *Rhapsodies* and *Champavert* did concerning Borel's relationship both to his prospective audience and to his text.

The chapter begins with Borel's invoking the pain and struggle of the work's inception. In the final remarks he makes on *Madame Putiphar*, an unusual tone of sincerity (or mock-sincerity) pervades his description of the work's inception, and of his expectations for it. Borel reluctantly offers the work to his reader, with apparent regrets for its inconsistencies:

> Enfin voici ma tâche achevée, me voici au bout de ce livre qui m'a causé plus de peines encore qu'il ne m'en a coûté, et qui sans doute va m'en causer encore bien davantage [...] Pour ne nous occuper que du matériel, quelques erreurs typographiques qui ne m'appartiennent pas et quelques inadvertances qui m'appartiennent, m'ont échappé à la correction des épreuves, ce dont j'éprouve un grand chagrin. J'espère qu'on voudra bien ne point m'imputer ces errata à crime ou à ignorance.[53]

This avowal contrasts sharply with Borel's previous rhetorical addresses to his reader. In the past, he has thrust the work upon the reader while denying responsibility for its savagery (*Rhapsodies*); or he offered the work with apparent goodwill and sincerity,

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[51] Ibid., see above, note 21.

[52] Ibid.

[53] Ibid., p. 376.

while masking his true intentions (*Champavert*). At the end of *Madame Putiphar*, we find a relatively humble and transparent presentation of the literary work, albeit a presentation that still respects, to a certain degree, the autonomy of the work from the living author.

In previous work, Borel presented a provocation and a challenge to his reader. He falsely portrayed his relationship to the text, and falsely portrayed his intentions regarding his reader. The text's autonomy came in the freedom that his irony and duplicity engendered. The reader could not impute a concrete meaning to the text using authorial intentions or biographical data, and was at times misled to do so, only to find himself disabused or disappointed as a result of his reading. The text was designed to frustrate the reader, and cause him to question his capacity for judgment. In *Madame Putiphar*, the work is presented as more autonomous and as much less subject to authorial control. Borel frequently expresses his frustration with the editorial difficulties he suffered, and with his own fitful relationship with his sources of inspiration. The effort of creating the novel, and its supposed elusiveness from the author, sharpen Borel's desire that the public will appreciate it.

Nowhere in the past did Borel express his aim to please the reader, except in the rare cases where he addressed himself exclusively to members of his artistic circle. There was always a pretended, nobler, artistic motive, were it to 'descendre dans l'intimité d'un être sensible', or to give vent to the inexorable flow of ideas in *Rhapsodies* that were necessary to artistic growth. Indeed, in *Rhapsodies*, Borel had excused himself entirely from the need to please his reader:

> A ceux qui diront: ce livre a quelque chose de suburbain qui répugne, on répondra qu'effectivement l'auteur ne fait pas le lit du Roi.[54]

[54] Borel, Pétrus, *Rhapsodies*, p. 15.

Borel had always addressed the possibility that his work would provoke displeasure. Acutely conscious of the probable conditions of the work's reception, he nevertheless invariably remarked that he was proud of his insouciance regarding public opinion.

At the end of *Madame Putiphar*, however, Borel displays a noticeable change of heart. He offers his excuses for a work that he intended primarily *for the pleasure* of his readers:

> Je vous remercie aussi avec empressement, ma chère belle et douce lectrice. Maintenant vous me connaissez à fond; je vous ai fait descendre jusque dans les replis les plus secrets de mon coeur; je ne sais si je vous plais, mais je sais, moi, que je vous aime beaucoup.

There is perhaps a hint of irony here, yet the tone of humility and gratitude does indicate a certain resignation: Borel is reluctant to continue that provocative and elusive rhetorical performance of his earlier work that obscured his relation to the text, even if he continues to be frustrated by the life that a literary work takes on once it is freed from the creative hand of the artist. He now wishes to please his audience, but his desire is subverted by the 'autonomy' of the work. This was not a problem for Borel before he developed a desire to endear himself to the reader. In the past, if the work were misinterpreted, or failed to please, he would simply show scorn for those whom he implied were incapable of comprehending his irony. He could feel safe that his message would at least make a good joke for his literary comrades at the expense of the *bourgeois* reader. But, by 1839, the *jeune-France* group had largely dispersed. Borel was feeling the pinch of financial hardship, and had little contact with his old friends. The need for recognition and for compensation for his work grew more acute. Thus, the typesetting errors, shallow criticism and received opinions that distort the public view of the work suddenly become a major concern. While Borel was previously ready to throw his work in the face of the public, or to mislead his public and enjoy the celebrity of scandal, suddenly he finds that he detests the painful process of detaching himself from the work,

and watching it fall under the destructive eye of the critic, the editor and the ordinary reader. He admits that the novel has caused him as much pain as he put into its creation. His difficulties lie not only with his readership, but with the professional side of book editing and publication.

As I have argued earlier, the new printing press technology imported into France from England opened the way for many young men like Borel to pursue a literary career. But the new technology, and the atmosphere of political turmoil led them to face a set of problems that did not exist for the previous generation of Romantic authors. Money was a prime concern. Borel realised that Academy prizes, critical articles, and all of the feedback from bodies to whom artists were accountable directly affected the conditions of a young artist's livelihood. Borel and his comrades were not able to retreat to ivory towers such as Vigny described. They were rioting in the streets with the populace, and living from hand to mouth in cheap rented accommodation. They strongly felt the effects of popular movements, political uprising, and new attitudes in the literary press. They were an acute barometer of changing literary fortunes. Thus, during the period of production and editing of *Madame Putiphar*, a great deal of Borel's correspondence is devoted to editorial and financial problems relating to his work.[55] In these letters, we find that Borel shows contradictory attitudes when dealing with the professionals in charge of the editing and printing of *Madame Putiphar*, in much the same way that he held his public in both esteem and contempt, as evinced in his prefaces, and to a lesser degree in his fiction and poetry. Borel now, it seems, needs the professional literary establishment slightly more than he resents them.

Thus, in a letter to Renduel dated 22 January, 1837, Borel is hopeful about his work and dispenses promises freely:

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[55] *See* Richer, Jean, 'Lettres inédites de Pétrus Borel', in *Revue des Sciences Humaines*, April-September, 1960, pp. 249-55.

> [...] j'ai pris la résolution, que je tiendrai, de ne pas reparaître à Paris que mon livre ne soit achevé. Quoique j'y travaille sans cesse, il n'en est pas encore là, il s'avance pourtant. Vous le savez, les bonnes choses ne se font pas au pas de course, et j'ai l'immodestie de croire que mon livre est destiné á prendre rang [...][56]

And in a later letter to another editor, Ollivier, after his relations with Renduel had soured:

> [...] je vous fais un beau livre dont le succès vous dédommagera et au delà des ennuis qu'il aura pu vous causer.[57]

Borel is keen to please the men who will be paying him, but when work is slow and payment for the manuscript is hence not forthcoming, Borel shows little capacity for compromise or understanding. His talent for invective and exaggeration is not confined to his literary work. At a later stage of the work, Borel asks for an advance of 50 francs from Ollivier. Ollivier refuses the sum, noting the tardiness of Borel's previous manuscripts;[58] he promises payment when the approved pages of the manuscript reach the copyist. Borel threatens to withold the entire manuscript indefinitely, implying that he has more copy than he is submitting, and in a long letter that makes clear his irritation, demands more money, saying that he has furnished suitable amounts of text already, and that he will hand over more manuscript pages when he feels the copyist *deserves* them. In a pretentious conclusion to his letter, he describes the task of writing *Madame Putiphar* as a sacred duty, conferred upon him by God:

> Si les cinquante francs que vous me devez ne me sont pas payés, si votre conscience vous permet de retenir les gages d'un travailleur, ce n'est pas comme, semble-t-il, mon ami M. Dondey vous l'a dit, *Madame Putiphar* qui souffrira. Non, Monsieur c'est moi seul, à moins– ce que Dieu ne permettra certainement pas– que je ne succombe sous le poids du besoin avant d'avoir été capable de finir le travail dont Il m'a chargé comme d'une tâche sacrée. Vous trouvez que c'est une bonne plaisanterie de faire souffrir à une autre personne les tourments de la faim, de faire souffrir à votre ouvrier les tourments de la faim, alors que vous lui

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[56] Ibid., p. 252.

[57] Ibid.

[58] Ibid, p. 253.

> opposez sa propre délicatesse comme un crime. Curieuse façon de voir les choses![59]

The reader cannot take much that Borel writes in this heated exchange very seriously. In his previous correspondence with O'Neddy, he was realistic about the quality of his novel. His tendency to exaggerate when it suits him is clear, and perhaps even the squalor of his living conditions in Bas Baizil contains a strong element of literary colour.

Borel, interestingly, had recourse to the aid of Balzac in his literary and editorial squabbles of this period.[60] About the same time that he was fighting Ollivier and Renduel for payment, he was embroiled with Curmer, editor of *Les français peints par eux-mêmes*, over payments for a humorous character sketch. Balzac and Borel wrote to each other with some frequency in 1839, and Balzac came to Borel's rescue when he took his quarrel with Curmer before a literary tribunal, the Comité de la société des gens de lettres. Borel supposed that he was to be paid by the page for his sketch entitled 'Le Croquemort'. Naturally, he made it as long as possible. When he found that he was only to be paid a fixed sum, he flew into a rage and filed a complaint with the Comité. Balzac's letters, both to Curmer and to the Comité, reveal enormous tact and patience when dealing with the irascible Borel. Although Borel lost his case, Balzac managed to secure another contract for him with Curmer, this time for his sketch entitled 'Le Gniaffe'. This was despite Borel's continued refusal to compromise in any way with Curmer or the tribunal.

The connection between Borel and Balzac apparently does not stop there. Marie and Steinmetz have cited Desmoulins's *Révolutions de Flandre et de Brabant* as a primary source for the plot elements of *Madame Putiphar*. In Desmoulins's historical account there is a story of one Macdonaugh, an Irishman, whose wife is seduced by his

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[59] Letter reprinted in Steinmetz, Jean-Luc, 'Les Malheurs du récit' in *Madame Putiphar*, p. 419.

[60] see 'Balzac et Pétrus Borel' by Jean-Luc Steinmetz in *L'Année balzacienne*, III, (1982), pp. 63-76.

colonel. The colonel has the Irish captain thrown into the prison on Sainte-Marguerite. In Desmoulins's version, MacDonaugh's wife, Rose Plunkett, renounces him, and is quite happy living with her new husband. The plot of Desmoulins's work foreshadows Balzac's own *Le Colonel Chabert*. In fact, Balzac's colonel is renounced by his wife, who shares the name of Rose with Desmoulins's character. Balzac's novella was completed in 1832, at a time when he was portrayed in the literary press as a *bousingo*. Borel was doubtless familiar with the work, and it is quite likely that he came across the *Révolutions de Flandre et de Brabant* having first read Balzac. In the summer of 1839, near the time of publication of *Madame Putiphar*, Borel, Gautier and a number of the other ageing members of the 'Petit cénacle' occasionally joined Balzac for lunch at his home in Jardies. And in June of the same year, Balzac published *Les Secrets de la princesse de Cadignan* with the old *bousingo* fraternity in mind. The work was dedicated to Gautier.

Madame Putiphar did then have more interaction with contemporaries than could be supposed; and Borel quite clearly attempted to adopt a different attitude regarding his reader, due to his changing circumstances and his evolving literary strategies.

In the final analysis, Borel's capacity for provocation and his unreasonable tendency to go against the grain in any situation are the two clearest and most immediate elements that come out of a reading of his correspondence concerning the editorial difficulties of *Madame Putiphar*. Borel's faults are aggravated by the enormity of the task at hand; he had obviously laboured harder with this novel than he had with his previously published literary work, and at the same time, his expectations were entirely different. Borel had a greater and more transparent commitment to his audience with *Madame Putiphar*. It was a melodramatic novel that Borel naturally hoped would touch his readers in the way that melodramatic theatre had done in the case of authors like Pixerécourt.

Borel, Pixerécourt and Melodrama

We must now return to the study of melodrama, and to Guilbert de Pixerécourt, because of the ethical and narrative strategies that melodrama and Borel's work share, and because of the clear importance of Pixerécourt's play *Latude* in the 1830s. For the moment, it is important to re-state briefly Borel's use of melodramatic elements, and their correlation to his conception of his relationship with his reader, and to the debates on the rôle of the artist that raged in the early years of Borel's career. The melodramatic plot structures and characterisations in *Champavert* imply a specific sort of moralising resolution in each story that was systematically denied. Borel's experimentation with various ethical and narrative strategies was simultaneous with the popular discussions in which Borel participated in the press concerning the rôle of the artist in society. As I have previously suggested, the form of Romantic Irony that Borel developed was thus clearly a response to the conditions of an artist's engagement with his public of that tumultuous period of the early 1830s.

Borel's irony changed quite dramatically in 1839. Certainly, he had been particularly adept at mocking and provoking a large section of his readership, something that aided him in commanding the loyalty of the other members of the *bousingo* or *jeune-France* group, whose literary projects were at times a mock attempt at edifying the bourgeoisie. But, in the case of *Madame Putiphar*, Borel was finally trying to engage the attention of someone who did not necessarily share in his literary ideas. Borel dedicated the work to Lucinde Paradol, a famous actress of the period, and someone in whom Borel had more than a passing interest.[61] The writing of a book that did not involve the sort of provocative irony of his previous work was perhaps the only means by which he could

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[61] Clarétie, Jules, *Pétrus Borel, le lycanthrope*, p. 142.

hope to catch and sustain the attention of a reader for whom his feelings were quickly developing, but the endeavour entailed a much greater risk than Borel had undertaken before.

It is obvious from the plot structure of *Madame Putiphar* that Borel continues to employ the thematics and narrative forms of melodrama through the end of the 1830s, long after the most furious period of artistic and political debate in the popular and literary press has subsided. But although part of the thematic and narrative model remains the same, Borel's ethical relationship to his reader changes with this last work. Was Borel simply responding to the changing intellectual climate? Was he responding to his own deteriorating material circumstances? We must consider all of these factors, in addition to one that has been overlooked in previous studies of Borel. Borel borrowed extensively from the work of Guilbert de Pixerécourt, the recognised founder of the melodramatic genre, and a great celebrity, whose plays were acknowledged during Borel's early career not so much for their literary merit, but for their power to *touch* the audience and to make them respond emotionally.

Madame Putiphar has been previously examined as a late and eccentric addition to the genre of the Gothic, historical novel. But all attempts at tracing the novel's source of inspiration directly to Gothic novels or historical accounts have been unsatisfactory. The connections between Borel's work and Gothic fiction involve a tenuous and vague body of shared imagery. The possible historical sources are all fairly obscure, and tell the critic little of the intentions or construction of Borel's novel. Earlier critics have also searched for the sources of Borel's book among the personal accounts of the Revolution of 1789. Enid Starkie was the first to point out striking similarities between the memoirs of Henri Masers de Latude of 1793 and *Madame Putiphar.*[62] Borel includes Masers de

[62] Starkie, Enid, *Petrus Borel, the Lycanthrope*, p. 132. Steinmetz claims that Marie was the first to notice the connection to Latude, but there is no reference to Latude in Marie's book.

Latude among the names of prisoners transferred to the dungeon of Vincennes.[63] As I have mentioned, Marie recognises similarities between the plight of Déborah and Patrick at the hands of the predatory Marquis de Villepastour, and a similar story of persecution in Desmouslin's *Révolutions de Flandre et de Brabant.* Borel himself briefly compares Déborah to 'Geneviève de Brabant et son fils Bénoni, échappant à la hache du traître Golo'.[64] Jean-Luc Steinmetz finds marked similarities between Déborah's imprisonment in the Parc aux Cerfs, and the *Mémoires de la comtesse du Barri* [sic]: 'ces mémoires étaient relativement récentes [sic], et Borel y puise sans parcimonie.'[65] Since Borel's finances were in a perilous state at this period, he was probably not in a position to spend money on new books, or to pay the fees of private lending libraries. But, through literary friends, he was able to borrow frequently from the Bibliothèque Royale. He was working on *Madame Putiphar*, between 1836 and 1839, and his own borrowing records from the Bibliothèque Royale indicate that he consulted a small number of surveys, memoirs and apocryphal works on the secret intrigues under Louis XV that would have served his historical research.[66] Voltaire's *Le siècle de Louis XV* (vols II and III), the apocryphal *Mémoires de Madame la Marquise de Pompadour*, and Charles Pinot Duclos' *Mémoires secrets sur les règnes de Louis XIV et de Louis XV*, borrowed by Borel in April of 1837 all concern this period.[67]

But no critic has taken into account the most probable source of inspiration for *Madame Putiphar*, one that was much closer to Borel: Pixerécourt's *Latude ou trente cinq ans de captivité.*[68] This play, which opened at the Gaîté on 5 November, 1834, was

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[63]Borel, *Madame Putiphar*, p. 252.

[64]Ibid., p. 281.

[65] Steinmetz, Jean-Luc, *Pétrus Borel, un auteur provisoire*, p. 104.

[66] I owe this information to the very recent and exhaustive survey of Borel's library borrowings by Jacques-Remi Dahan, 'Pétrus Borel et la Bibliothèque Royale', which I received through correspondence with the author.

[67]Dahan, 'Pétrus Borel et la Bibliothèque Royale', p. 7.

[68]*Latude ou trente cinq ans de captivité* in de Pixerécourt, Guilbert, *Théâtre*, pp. 385-498

among the most successful of Pixerécourt's later plays. Borel, and any Parisian of the period, would have been familiar with the circumstances of Henri Masers de Latude's imprisonment via Pixerécourt. And, more significantly, Borel would have known that the horrible circumstances of Latude's imprisonment, the injustice of 'lettres de cachet', the damp and filthy prison cells, the slow and inexorable onset of madness in the prisoner, all of the grotesque and shocking elements would have achieved particularly vivid expression on the stage. Popular illustrations by Daumier of the period highlight the strong emotional response of spectators in the *Boulevard* theatres, contrasted with the reserve and pretension, even boredom, of the attendees of the *Comédie Française.*[69] Paul Lacroix, editor of the inventory of rare books that comprised Pixerécourt's library (and also reviewer of *Champavert* for the *Revue de Paris* in 1833) described the play's effect on its spectators:

> [...] son dernier drame, *Latude*, cette touchante pièce qui n'a pas encore tari les larmes du public.[70]

Latude was a play whose popularity could be compared with top-grossing Hollywood films of today. It was a work that had proven, more than any other, that this subject-matter, in melodramatic form, was capable of eliciting a strong reaction from the audience.

Borel's borrowing from Pixerécourt was not confined to *Le Fanal de Messine*, *Latude* and *Madame Putiphar.* In 1835, between *Champavert* and *Madame Putiphar*, Borel worked on a translation of Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe.* Borel certainly displayed an affinity with Crusoe's solitude. He longed for the kind of isolation that Crusoe suffered after his shipwreck. As I have suggested, Borel lamented that he was a republican and

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[69] Marcoux, Jean Paul, *Guilbert de Pixerécourt, French Melodrama in the Early Nineteenth Century* (New York: Peter Lang, 1992), p. 27.

[70] Lacroix, Paul, 'Introduction' to Pixerécourt, Guilbert, *Catalogue des livres rares composant la bibliothèque de M. G. de Pixerécourt* (Paris: J. Crozet, 1838), p. VII.

self-styled political 'lycanthrope' '[...] puisque je ne puis pas être caraïbe'.[71] 1835 also saw Borel's second stay in Sainte-Pélagie prison. Isolation and imprisonment were themes that doubtless occupied him heavily. But the figure of Robinson Crusoe was not one upon which Borel happened by chance, or through his pretended researches. The previous translation of the work by Madame Tastu was not among the most popular versions of Defoe. Saint-Hyacinthe's earlier translation was better known, and was to be found in Pixerécourt's library.[72] Not surprisingly, at the turn of the eighteenth century, one of the most popular representations of *Robinson Crusoe* was Pixerécourt's dramatic representation of the novel. Admittedly, there are substantial differences between the play and the novel, but the recognition of the theme must have been high as a result of the popularity of the piece. The *Courrier des spectacles* for 3 October 1805 announced that the streets around the Porte Saint-Martin were jammed with anxious theatre-goers in the hours before the first performance.[73] Pixerécourt is almost single-handedly responsible for assuring the popularity of Defoe's subject into the early 1800s. It is probable that Borel's knowledge of Defoe also came via Pixerécourt, if indirectly.

Borel had always taken an interest in the theatre. He militated in favour of *Hernani*, and wrote theatrical criticism in the early 1840s. At some point in the late 1830s, as has been suggested, he fell in love with Lucinde Paradol, a celebrated actress. There has been much speculation about his involvement with her. Both Marie and Starkie wondered whether or not the emotional turmoil of what appeared to be unrequited love was to answer for the apparent pessimism of *Madame Putiphar.*[74] Whatever was occuring in Borel's personal life, the reader must recognise a change in tone regarding

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[71] Borel, *Rhapsodies*, p. 13, cited above, p. 53.

[72] de Pixerécourt, Guilbert, *Catalogue des livres rares composant la bibliothèque de M. G. de Pixerécourt*, p. 107.

[73] Marcoux, *Guilbert de Pixerécourt*, p. 31.

[74] Starkie, Enid, *Pétrus Borel the Lycanthrope*, p. 131, and Marie, Aristide, *La Vie et l'oeuvre de Pétrus Borel, le lycanthrope*, pp. 107-8.

Borel's authorial asides and interjections to his reader. The book is dedicated to Lucinde Paradol, and within the work, the author frequently addresses a reader who is most often feminine. A tone of obsequiousness and sincerity characterises many of Borel's addresses to his prospective reader. While, in his previous fiction, Borel employed titillating literary entrapments - promises of forbidden knowledge, macabre scenes that tempted the reader's voyeurism - in *Madame Putiphar*, he is at times tender, even polite. In the past, Borel had always kept his identity and his intentions well out of the reader's grasp, but in *Madame Putiphar* there is a moment of figurative physical contact between the reader, whom Borel had once hoped to entice, and then betray:

> Donnez-moi votre main, seigneur lecteur; donnez-moi votre main si jolie encore sous son gant parfumé, ma belle dame, et remontons ensemble le sentier rapide qui ondoie et va s'attacher comme un ruban sur l'épaule de la colline.[75]

A quieter intimacy is evident throughout *Madame Putiphar* than the provocative or confrontational attitudes that Borel adopted toward his reader in earlier work.

Borel was not in the habit of dedicating his books to anyone outside his close circle of literary comrades. As we have seen in the changes of tone with which he addressed his reader in *Rhapsodies*, there was no tone that fell between the tenderness and gratitude he expressed toward his literary friends, and the invective he focused upon the anonymous and unsuspecting reader. But proofs of the dedication page of *Madame Putiphar* reveal a change in his attitude. The book is dedicated to Lucinde Paradol. The dedication went through a number of stages before reaching its final form in the published work:[76]

A TOI
et
POUR TOI

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[75]Borel, *Madame Putiphar*, p. 324.

[76] Steinmetz, Jean-Luc, 'Les Malheurs du récit', in *Madame Putiphar*, p. 392

And then:

à
L.

Ce livre
est à toi et pour toi,
mon amie

And the final version:

A
L. P.
Ce livre
est à toi et pour toi
mon amie

The dedications become more formal with each version, but still imply closeness. One must imagine that Borel faced some difficulty in reaching an appropriate tone of intimacy both with his prospective reader, and with the object of his affection.

At the work's conclusion, Borel thanks the reader for the admittedly arduous task of reading the work. In *Champavert* and *Rhapsodies*, Borel had addressed the reader in the prefaces, but in these two earlier works the design and intention of his addresses to the reader could not have been more different from what we encounter in *Madame Putiphar*. Near the end of *Madame Putiphar*, Borel describes, retrospectively, the experience of having read the work as an intimate act that has brought the reader to a true and close understanding of some fundamental qualities of the author:

> Maintenant vous me connaissez à fond [...] c'est avec une grande tristesse que je me sépare de vous.[77]

The transformation is remarkable, and the final line of *Madame Putiphar* reveals much about the changes in Borel's perception of his relationship to his prospective reader:

> Oh! si jamais, après m'avoir entendu, le public, cet autre prince Hamlet, pouvait me dire: -- Soyez le bienvenu, monsieur, à Elsineur![78]

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[77] Borel, *Madame Putiphar*, pp. 376-7.

[78] Ibid., p. 377.

The image of a public that is, like Hamlet, vacillating, inscrutible and fickle in its loyalties conforms to the portrait that Borel must have developed over the course of his tumultuous career. And in this final sentence of his last serious literary effort, Borel expresses the wish that the public would be welcoming, in full knowledge of the difficulties that he suffered in creating the work, and despite his tendency for provocation.

The Philosophical Background to *Madame Putiphar*: Ballanche, de Maistre and Borel

While not participating in the Romantic mainstream as many critics perceive it, Borel was, as we know, considered highly symptomatic of literary concerns of his age. He epitomised a number of the thematic dialectics of Romantic fiction, for example the focusing on imprisonment:

> Certains thèmes privilégiés expliqueraient l'intérêt porté par les Romantiques à l'image de la prison : beauté tragique de la solitude, individualisme et inquiétude devant le problème de l'identité, angoisse existentielle (Freud insistera sur le rapport *Angst-angustiae*), problématique spatio-temporelle (le temps d'arrêt comme intemporalité utopique), glorification de la révolte qui transforme la société en prison et le forçat en héros d'un double drame de la chute et du rachat, orgueil de tout châtiment-détention sous le signe ambivalent de Prométhée-Lucifer. L'essentiel résidera toujours dans le jeu dialectique : les tensions entre oppression et rêve de liberté, entre fatalité et volonté, entre la conscience des limites et le désir d'infini.[79]

The Romantic fascination with prisons and incarceration touched Borel particularly with reference to the problems that Brombert obliquely addresses concerning the artist's identity. Similarly, Gothic fiction flowed rather comfortably into the Romantic

[79]Brombert, Victor, *La Prison romantique* (Paris: José Corti, 1975), p. 15.

movement; the lines between Gothic, melodramatic and Romantic were rarely clear, and this was particularly the case in the early 1830s.

Madame Putiphar is a hybrid between melodrama, Gothic fiction, historical fiction and many of the philosophical and thematic tendencies of Borel's epoch. Indeed, it serves as a unique example in the way that it brings these various genres together. *Madame Putiphar* is ostensibly an historical novel, and yet its historicism is compromised by the Gothic and horrific elements. These on the other hand are tempered. There is little more than a hint of the supernatural, and the work does not resort to overt fantasy, nor does it eschew the historical sources that often comprise the unstated background to tensions in the Gothic plot.[80] The abundant and prolonged scenes of cruelty and suffering set the novel apart from melodramatic offerings: even a piece meant to be as titillating and morbid as *Latude, ou trente-cinq ans de captivité* does not exhibit the sort of horror found in Borel's graphic descriptions. *Madame Putiphar* may then be seen not only as a key to understanding Borel's final struggle with his contradictory ideas on the writer's vocation, but as a curious generic mix that is grounded in an eclectic blend of philosophical sources treating the legacy of the Revolution of 1789, and drawing upon the thematics of a number of genres, all sharing a similar relationship to traumatic historical fact.

The popularity of the Gothic genre in France in the early nineteenth century, like the popularity of melodrama, may be explained by a general desire to come to terms with the historical tumult of the 18th century. '[L]e genre [gothique] devenait le fruit indispensable des secousses révolutionnaires, dont l'Europe entière se ressentait'.[81] The

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[80]Brombert, *La Prison Romantique*, and Lévy, Maurice, *Le Roman 'gothique' anglais*, (Toulouse: Espic, 1968). Both authors, in addition to Jean-Luc Steinmetz in his work on Borel, note that the tensions evident in Gothic fiction, despite their historical motivation, are often disguised behind a thick fabric of myth: the particular trappings of the Gothic novel, the haunted castle, the prison, religious perversion and abuse of power, are all linked to historical phenomena, but are rarely displayed in historical terms, employing symbolism and the fantastic to express conflicts finding root in real events.

[81] de Sade, D. A. F., *Idée sur les romans*, pp. 52-53.

Gothic novel in France was also undeniably influenced by German and mainly English predecessors, widely translated in the 1820s. Like melodrama, the Gothic was a popular genre that expressed 'la moralité de la Révolution'. This is obviously not a new means of approaching Gothic fiction, but on its own is inadequate to understand more than certain superficial aspects of *Madame Putiphar*. In his short chapter on Borel, Brombert proposes from the outset to examine universal tropes of prison and persecution in the Romantic genre; his critique of Borel spends little time on historical or generic specificities. Brombert's chapter on Borel places him in a context that is so wide as to reveal little that is unique. Conversely (and ironically, given his post-modern approach to most of Borel's work), Steinmetz follows too closely the correlations between actual historical sources and Borel's account of the events leading to the Revolution. When Steinmetz attempts to create more general metaphors from *Madame Putiphar*, and from the sparse historical sources that he has uncovered, he finds little with which to build a picture of the intellectual context in which Borel worked. (As we have seen, Borel did not consult many works in his research.) Steinmetz instead turns to loose Freudian metaphors (the Oedipal relationship between Vengeance and Déborah, the threatening orality of Lord Cockermouth) to make greater sense of the novel. Only two articles devote a significant proportion of analysis to *Madame Putiphar*'s relationship to the Revolution of 1789 in the context of literary ethics, and the relationship between literature and politics. As was mentioned in a previous chapter, Eluard and Didier trace the metaphysical revolt of Borel and Sade, and find a lineage parenting Sade to Borel, and subsequently Lautréamont and Rimbaud. Both articles rely less on precise historical sources common to the works of Sade and Borel than on a perceived, common, intellectual make-up. The parallels can be pinned down a little more. Of course, it cannot be said that both authors shared in the same cultural climate, but they were exposed to many of the same ideas, and their approach to the Revolution of 1789

(through first-hand experience in the case of Sade, and through some historical sources, family history and anecdote in the case of Borel[82]) was remarkably similar. Borel admired Sade, and included him as a character in the novel. When Patrick is transferred from Vincennes to the Bastille, he shares a coach with Sade, described by Borel as 'une des gloires de la France'.[83]

Undoubtedly, there is more to Borel's project to write an account that attempts to come to moral grips with the Revolution of 1789 than a fascination with obscure historical material, or, according to Brombert, his vague participation in the larger currents of Romanticism exploring issues of imprisonment. *Madame Putiphar* bears all of the marks of the very specific and short lived historical and intellectual phenomena in which Borel was immersed and which have formed the core of this thesis's re-creation of his cultural climate. Significant at this point was a resurgence of interest in philosophers and theologians who explored ideas on suffering, historical upheaval and expiation. Before reaching any conclusions about Borel's final exploration of his relationship with his reader, or of the importance of the debates concerning the artist and his role in society in the larger philosophical context of debates on history and the Revolutions of 1830 and 1789, we must examine the philosophical underpinnings of *Madame Putiphar*.

Borel frames historical upheaval with Gothic elements that in other novels are found cloaked in fantasy, applying them directly to the historical events from which they have evolved. He presents a morality tale that reflects not only a historical critique and a reflection of the Gothic fashion of the period, but also a philosophical stance that has been largely ignored by other critics of Borel's work. Borel frequently alluded to his second-hand experience of the Terror in Lyon, and the persecution of his family, learned through the stories of relatives. He was immersed in literary depictions of 1789 and thus

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[82]See Clarétie, Jules, *Pétrus Borel, le Lycanthrope*, and Marie, Aristide, *Pétrus Borel, le lycanthrope*.

[83]Borel, *Madame Putiphar*, p. 313.

fell quite naturally under the influence of certain pre-romantic philosopher/theologians, whose thought was pre-occupied by a reaction to the rational philsophies of the *lumières* ; these philosophies were seen as directly contributing to the carnage and disarray brought about by the Revolution, and authors such as de Maistre and Ballanche represented a reaction against such rationalism, as well as representing an attempted reconciliation between religion and the historical patterns whose trauma defied immediate comprehension.

In the later part of his novel, Borel returns again and again to the idea of expiation as the overarching principle that makes possible the extremity of suffering depicted, and that anticipates the fulfilment of the drama's final sentence: 'Mais qu'elle fut bien vengée!!!' - referring here to the avenging rôle that the carnage of the Revolution plays in righting the injustice perpetrated against Déborah by the nobleman Villepastour and by the monarch, Pharaon. This revelation concerning justice fulfilled, coming so late in the novel, reflects a fairly popular current of thought among Romantic and pre-romantic authors and philosophers, particularly in respect to the literary and philosophical attitudes toward the Revolution of 1789.

Among the most influential of the conservative thinkers of the time was Joseph de Maistre, whose Catholic mysticism, and whose ideas on expiation and on human suffering were direct reactions to the traumas of the Revolution. Without recourse to Enlightenment concepts, de Maistre's project was to impose order on the massive suffering inflicted by social upheaval.

De Maistre's principal work, *Les Soirées de Saint-Pétersbourg*, was written sometime before 1806 and published posthumously in 1821.[84] The book comprises a series of interviews between fictional characters discussing issues of philosophy, politics

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[84] de Maistre, Joseph, *Les Soirées de Saint-Pétersbourg* in *Oeuvres inédites* (Paris: Vaton Frères, 1870).

and theology. De Maistre's brand of philosophy and mysticism exercised a strong influence on a number of authors through the nineteenth century, but most significant, in the scope of this study, are Borel and Baudelaire. De Maistre exercised a significant influence on the latter: 'de Maistre et Edgar Poe m'ont appris à raisonner.'[85] De Maistre's philosophical scheme involved a view of the world as governed by an occult and incomprehensible moral order, manifested imperfectly on the material plane; his thought covered most of the themes that would preoccupy artists of Borel's generation and later: historical upheaval, capital punishment, illuminism, expiation. The parallels between the philosophical ideas expounded in *Les Soirées de Saint-Pétersbourg*, and aspects of *Madame Putiphar*, are too striking to ignore.

In general, de Maistre viewed the Enlightenment as a degradation of spiritual beliefs whose ultimate truths, unable to be proved by rational means, were in evidence thanks to their universality and tradition. Borel shared a sort of conservative Rousseauism with de Maistre (though de Maistre would have balked at the term) in his fascination with the integrity and purity of primitive, European peoples. Borel saw elements of an uncorrupted dignity in the Celtic peoples, particularly in their conception of the artist's role. For Borel, this came to an end with the 'civilizing' influence of the English. De Maistre's respect for primitive cults stems from a similar appreciation of what he described as the 'universal truths' that they expressed, and that were later adopted by Christianity.[86] Pagan beliefs were, for de Maistre, corrupted precursors of Christian ideas that spoke of an inconceivable and universal order governed by Providence and imperfectly manifested in the material world. There are echoes of Swedenborg and of Plato in de Maistre.

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[85] Baudelaire, Charles,*OC*, vol. I, p. 669.

[86] de Maistre, Joseph, *Oeuvres inédites*, p. 140-1.

De Maistre and Borel shared an innate conservatism that coloured their approach to the philosophy of language. Borel's explorations of language, his fascination with archaic etymology and his use of often incongruous foreign epithets as chapter headings all reveal his desire to re-discover an older, purer, more legitimate form of language that would implicitly reflect the integrity of the people who spoke it. Having lost his reason and reverted to an almost animal state, Patrick also reverts to the 'primitive' language of his Irish ancestors at the end of *Madame Putiphar*. In a similar vein of thought, de Maistre argues that language was not invented, but was a divine gift. This implies that there exists an original and divine state of language, corrupted with the passage of time. On the question of language, de Maistre grudgingly accords some credit to Rousseau, but only on a point where Rousseau admits confusion:

> Rousseau, dans une de ses rapsodies sonores, montre aussi quelque envie de parler raison. Il avoue que les langues lui paroissent une assez belle chose. La parole, cette *main d'esprit*, comme dit Charron, le frappe d'une certaine admiration; et tout considéré, il ne comprend pas bien clairement comment elle a été inventée.[87]

Obviously, given his theological foundation, de Maistre could not allow the *invention* of language in his schema, even if he showed an affinity in some instances with the idea of an unspoiled, Rousseauian primitivism. But, for de Maistre, this prior state of humanity and of language was God-given; language existed long before man and is one of many indications of the occult reign of Providence:

> Nulle langue n'a pu être inventée, ni par un homme qui n'auroit pu se faire obéir, ni par plusieurs qui n'auroient pu s'entendre. Ce qu'on peut dire de mieux sur la parole, c'est ce qui a été dit de celui qui s'appelle PAROLE. *Il s'est élancé avant tous les temps du sein de son principe; il est aussi ancien que l'éternité... Qui pourra raconter son origine?*[88]

Like Borel, de Maistre is fascinated by questions of etymology and linguistic history, and for almost the same reasons: to attempt to retrace, through etymology, the history of

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[87] de Maistre, op. cit., p. 146.

[88] Ibid.

language to rediscover the divine, original and legitimate state of language.[89] For de Maistre, the notion of an original, divine state extends to all facets of culture: art, language, morality. He believes strongly in a Golden Age, from which man has fallen.

One of de Maistre's other fundamental principles holds that there are no immutable natural laws, as professed by the philosophers of the 17th and particularly the 18th century. There are of course manifestations of a providential and dynamic order, but the idea of physical causes was, for de Maistre, nonsense:

> La matière n'a d'action que par le mouvement [...] [L]a matière ne peut rien, et même elle n'est rien que la preuve de l'esprit.[90]

This proposition, coming from the character of the Count, one of the three interlocutors of *Les Soirées*, and generally agreed to be that character who most closely expresses the thoughts of de Maistre himself, leads naturally to two ideas crucial to the understanding of *Madame Putiphar.*

The concept of a providential and incomprehensible spiritual order that directs the life of the material world lies at the core of the plot of *Madame Putiphar.* The occult spiritual order, orchestrating the life of the world, is nothing new in Borel's work. Both in *Rhapsodies* and *Champavert* we have seen examples of the cruel deity who toys with men's lives. The ironising plot structure of Borel's short fiction reveals a fascination with the sort of occult causality that de Maistre saw at the heart of the Revolution of 1789; for Borel, like de Maistre, viewed the causes of social upheaval and suffering as being frequently concealed.

Madame Putiphar develops these images and ideas much further than in Borel's previous work, and the outcome is decidedly Maistrean. De Maistre's refusal to

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[89]See Ibid., pp. 148-153.

[90] Ibid., p. 272.

recognise causes outside of the divine in his philosophical order means that each crime, each misdeed comes as punishment for a past crime, and that the current effects of past evils can accumulate to set in motion future cycles of crime, punishment and expiation. In this schema, crime and punishment move effortlessly across generations. Children are punished for the crimes of their ancestors:

> [...] *tout être qui a la faculté de se propager ne sauroit produire qu'un être semblable à lui.* La règle ne souffre pas d'exception: elle est écrite sur toutes les parties de l'univers. Si donc un être est dégradé, sa postérité ne sera plus semblable à l'état primitif de cet être, mais bien à l'état où il a été ravalé par une cause quelconque.[91]

Thus, Déborah's and Patrick's persecution stems from their tainted lineage:

> Lord Cockermouth, un méchant coeur, fils peut-être d'un coeur plus condamnable encore, n'expie-t-il pas ses torts par lui-même et par sa race. Il est puni en soi. Il est puni dans sa compagne. Il est puni dans sa fille.[92]

Even Patrick's apparent moral rectitude does not save him. His condemnation and suffering are explained late in the book in terms of his family's dark history:

> [...]Patrick, que nous voyons étendu sur le plus dur chevalet, procède d'une antique famille dégradée après des troubles populaires durant lesquels cette famille séditieuse avoit trempé sans doute dans plus d'un forfait.[93]

Borel echoes de Maistre's own words on the fallen nature of man and the reason for his sense of persecution and alienation in the face of traumatic events:

> [l'homme] sent qu'il est le résultat de quelque forfait inconnu, de quelque mélange détestable qui a vicié l'homme jusque dans son essence la plus intime.[94]

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[91] Ibid., p. 130.

[92] *Madame Putiphar*, p. 343.

[93] Ibid.

[94] de Maistre, op. cit., p. 133.

The same conditions apply to the fatally destined Vengeance, 'enfant appartenant à deux souches condamnées'.[95]

The destinies of these doomed characters contribute to the greater pool of popular misery in the years leading to the Revolution of 1789. Déborah, and particularly Patrick, act both to epitomise popular suffering, and as catalysts for insurrection. For de Maistre, too, the notion of suffering held an important communal nuance, inextricably linked to the idea of original sin: all humanity suffered the inexplicable anguish of the fall; and all suffering mirrored humanity's first introduction to the knowledge of good and evil. Each human being was subject to the torments of humanity, punishments that moved invisibly across generations and through populations:

> [...]par rapport à l'ordre général, il n'y a point d'injustice; c'est toujours un malheur attaché à la condition de l'homme et rien de plus. *Tout homme en qualité d'homme est sujet à tous les malheurs de l'humanité*[...][96]

After the storming of the Bastille, Patrick is paraded through the streets of Paris as an archetypical example of *ancien régime* cruelty. Rumours of the Parc aux cerfs, and Déborah's dogged pursuit of revenge, are shown to spur on the fury of the revolutionary crowds. The narrative of Déborah's suffering comes to a close with the gruesome dismemberment of de Villepastour at the hands of the mob, and with her own sacrificial death.

Another anomaly in the plot of Borel's novel that finds an apparent source in the theological writings of de Maistre is that there is no immediate resolution of that part of *Madame Putiphar*'s plot that comprises Patrick's and Déborah's suffering. Their ordeal lasts for decades until the precise and unforeseen moment when their search for justice intersects with popular upheaval. For both de Maistre and Borel, the expiatory suffering

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[95]Borel, *Madame Putiphar*, p. 344.

[96] de Maistre, op. cit., p. 101.

of the apparently innocent was not necessarily something that could be comprehended on an individual scale.

> [...] nous souffrons peut-être aujourd'hui pour des excès commis il y a plus d'un siècle[...][97]

> [...]toute *douleur* est un supplice imposé pour quelque crime actuel ou originel. [...] Pour justifier les voies de la Providence, même dans l'ordre temporel, il n'est point nécessaire du tout que le crime soit *toujours* puni et sans délai.[98]

There is a strong implication in *Madame Putiphar* that, among the occult forces pushing the narrative to its gory climax, the suffering of Déborah and Patrick acts forcefully in ways that neither the reader nor the author are meant to understand: 'Lorsque le vase de la colère de Dieu est plein, une larme de femme,-- et le vase déborde!'[99]

De Maistre's scheme conspicuously lacks the Christian concept of individual redemption through Christ. The idea of a self-propagating and downward-spiralling narrative of historical events lies at the core of both de Maistre's and Borel's world schemes. But, while de Maistre extrapolates his ideas on historical movement, suffering and punishment from theology, and primarily from the idea of original sin, Borel developed his ideas in the climate of literary debate and political insurrection around 1830. As we have seen, from an early point, Borel described the dynamic between artist, critic and public as being self-motivating and simultaneously self-destructive: criticism acted upon artistic production, which provoked more virulent and harmful criticism in turn. Symptoms acted upon causes, creating more aggravated symptoms, and, eventually, a complete breakdown of communication. The formula closely resembles de Maistre.

Redemption in de Maistre is achieved, not through forgiveness, but through the redemptive power of blood sacrifice. Borel and de Maistre share a conception of

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[97] Ibid., p. 129.

[98] de Maistre, Joseph, op. cit., p. 27

[99] Borel, *Madame Putiphar*, p. 345.

expiatory suffering that leads to strangely similar religious and political views. Borel's religiosity, transformed from the atheistic republicanism of his youth, bears some resemblance to the cruel and orthodox Catholicism of de Maistre. De Maistre's philosophical scheme is noticeably lacking in images of forgiveness. In the same vein, Borel's conception of divinity relates to the Saturnian idea of a vengeful and all-consuming justice. As Steinmetz points out, Borel's divinity is more a 'principe créateur de néant'; divine presence in his fiction is often represented through a threatening orality:

> Sur le chemin du néant se dresserait une effigie mythologique (elle aurait la même valeur que la guillotine dans l'Histoire). Elle mettrait à l'œuvre une force de voration, une oralité menaçante directement connectée à la tendance sadique.[100]

One need only remember Lord Cockermouth, the manifestation in name and in being of this constant and menacing paternal presence in the work of Borel. An identical self-consuming orality that symbolises collective vengeance in de Maistre is focused upon the sanctity of the guillotine.

Both de Maistre and Borel share a conception of the divinity of the physical means of expiation. De Maistre theorizes at length on the measures of public execution, the height of the guillotine in its symbolic relation to heaven, and on the expiatory power of blood.

> Les hommes n'ont jamais douté que l'innocence ne pût satisfaire pour le crime; et ils ont cru de plus qu'il y avait dans le sang une force expiatrice.[101]

Borel, too, alludes to the legitimising and expiatory function of spilt blood in the speech that Vengeance makes on his desire to make his birth legitimate through violence.[102]

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[100]Steinmetz, Jean-Luc, *Pétrus Borel, un auteur provisoire*, p. 54.

[101]de Maistre, Joseph, op. cit., p. 110.

[102] see note 25, p. 14.

Strong though de Maistre's influence on Borel was, he perhaps owes more of the philosophy of *Madame Putiphar* to Ballanche, also a native of Lyon, who couples moral, philosophical ideas on expiation with a philosophy of incarceration and of social evolution that is entirely compatible with Borel's graphic portrayal of Revolution, his statements on social progress and expiation, and his professed (though duplicitous) Republicanism. Ballanche was a more forgiving thinker than de Maistre. Though he relied on Catholic theology for his work, he expounded theories of criminal rehabilitation and social evolution that are strikingly modern. His idea of 'Palingénesie' resembles a primitive, Marxist dialectic of social forces.

The borrowing of Ballanche's work by Borel is more than plausible. Ballanche, though neglected as a thinker today, was extremely influential in the 1830s, particularly among the second generation of young Romantics who turned to philosophers of art and history who offered a concrete diagnosis of the malaise of the decade, and could project their ideas with confidence into the future. Saint-Simon, Ballanche and utopian socialists, mystics and sectarians of all suits enjoyed a brief but intense vogue.[103] Ballanche's *Œuvres complètes* appeared in 1830, and, although he had been writing for over a decade, the admiration of the generation that included the *bousingos* and *jeunes-France* greatly increased his fame.[104]

> Il faut avoir jugé par soi-même de l'impression exaltée que causait la seule présence de M. Ballanche; il faut avoir vu des jeunes gens, qui, après avoir erré dans les ténèbres d'une fausse philosophie, avaient enfin entrevu le port en lisant *Orphée* et la *Palingénésie sociale*, se jeter, pour ainsi dire, à ses pieds, et l'adorer presque comme leur sauveur [...][105]

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[103] While it is true that mysticism and illuminism exercised a strong influence on literature throughout the century, and that thinkers such as Swedenborg and de Maistre re-appear constantly through the Symbolist period, the intellectual and political climate of the 1830s nurtured particularly extravagant experiments with the occult and mystical.

[104] Ballanche, Pierre-Simon, *Œuvres complètes* (Paris: Barbezat, 1830).

[105] Lenormant, Charles, 'Ballanche', in *Le Correspondant*, April-June 1847, p. 825.

Ballanche had a morbid streak that particularly appealed to the generation of 1830. In the style of pre-romantic poets, such as Young in England (who, in *Madame Putiphar*, was among the favourite readings of Patrick), he called for the artist to find inspiration in sadness, and to immerse himself in scenes of horror. Ballanche's prescriptions were the *sine qua non* of the *bousingos* and *jeunes-France.*[106]

> Cherchez quelquefois l'orage; ne craignez pas les météores précurseurs de la tempête. Que la foudre déchire la nue, descende en sillons tortueux, brise un chêne vieux de plusieurs générations d'hommes et vienne mourir à vos pieds; que l'aquilon mugisse dans les anfractuosités des rochers [...] que la nuit vous surprenne aux prises avec tous ces phénomènes terribles; que l'obscurité enveloppe ces sites menacants; n'ayez d'autre lumière que la torche instantanée et intermittente de l'éclair. Ainsi perdu dans les ténènbres, fatigué par l'apparition des fantômes gigantesques qui se jouent d'une imagination épouvantée, attendez le retour de l'aurore.[107]

Borel himself, as a fellow native of Lyon, paid homage to his esteemed compatriot in the 'Notice sur Champavert':

> [L]ui [Champavert] ayant entendu nommer avec fierté comme ses compatriotes Philibert-Delorme, Martel-Ange, Servandoni, Adran, Stella, Coisevox, Coustou, et Ballanche! [...][108]

Baudelaire makes a rather humorous comment on the fraternity of *lyonnais* intellectuals that is not wholly out of place in this context:

> Lyon est une ville philosophique. Il y a une philosophie lyonnaise, une école de poésie lyonnaise, une école de peinture lyonnaise, et enfin une école de peinture philosophique lyonnaise.
> [...] Ville singulière, bigote et marchande, catholique et protestante, pleine de brumes et de charbons, les idées s'y débrouillent difficilement.[109]

One could certainly imagine Borel's fierce loyalty towards artists and thinkers from his native city in the face of his opposition to the civilising and standardising influences of

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[106] Albert, George, *Pierre-Simon Ballanche* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1945), p. 16.

[107] Ballanche, *Du Sentiment considéré dans ses rapports avec la littérature et les arts*, p. 101.

[108] Borel, Pétrus, *Champavert*, p. 9

[109] Baudelaire, Charles, *Œuvres complètes*, p. 1102.

the institutions of Paris. In addition, Ballanche and Borel were similarly affected by the events surrounding the counter-Revolution and the Terror in Lyon. Ballanche's father, a printer, was imprisoned and threatened with execution, saved only by the testimony of his co-workers, while Borel's father, according to whichever story one believes, was either heavily fined for seditious activities, or forced to flee to Switzerland. Both authors display, through their fascination with capital and corporal punishment and through their preoccupation with the philosphical and moral implications of social upheaval, the indelible mark of the Terror.

Gautier, during the same period, was at least superficially aware of the philosophy of history of Ballanche. His story 'Le bol de punch' from *Les Jeunes-France* was sub-titled 'conte panthéistique et palingénésique', making sarcastic use of Ballanche's term. The substance of the tale reveals no relation whatsoever to Ballanche, who is the victim of Gautier's barbs in the collection's preface:

> Je vous jure sur ce qu'il y a de plus sacré [...] qu'il n'y a pas plus d'idée dans ma préface que dans un livre quelconque de Ballanche.[110]

The comment is understandable; as I had pointed out previously, Borel's and Gautier's paths, at least in philosophy and politics, had begun to diverge considerably at this point. Gautier had little patience for discussions of either in relation to art.

Ballanche was reviewed and admired by those who engaged in debate on the rôle of the artist and criticism of the new 'political' types, the *bousingo* and *jeune-France*. Saint-Chéron commented at length on the new Romanticism, and had many opinons on the role of art in society, and on Ballanche's contribution to the debate.[111] Gustave Planche, critic for *L'Artiste*, a central forum for discussion by the *bousingos* and *jeunes-France,* published his autobiography in 1831 using Ballanche's title *L'Homme sans nom.*

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[110] Gautier, Théophile, *Les Jeunes-France*, p. III.

[111] *La Revue encyclopédique*, January-March, 1832.

This latter phrase was sarcastic because the image that had originated with Ballanche's work had become such common currency at that point as to be hackneyed. Ballanche's major work, and the one from which Borel borrowed most heavily, *La Ville des expiations*, was first published in fragments in *La France littéraire* of 1830.

Long neglected, Ballanche saw his stature rise tremendously in the space of just a few years, and he arguably exercised a considerable influence on poetry throughout the 19th century; in the early years of the century, he was among the first in France to elaborate on the concept of the poet as seer/messiah, as well as reviving an interest in the occult symbolism of language. In the early editions of her monograph on Rimbaud, Enid Starkie includes a short chapter on Ballanche. She boldly claims that Ballanche was one of the most important influences, if not the most important, upon nineteenth-century thought in France:

> In nineteenth century France the writer whose ideas are most frequently reflected in general theories of literature, philosophy, religion and history is the philosopher Ballanche.[112]

Starkie apparently revised her ideas, and in later editions, the chapter on Ballanche was dropped. It would be an exaggeration to say that Ballanche was the most influential philosopher of his century. Furthermore, many of his ideas, particularly from his early work, are shared with Chateaubriand, who expresses them with greater elegance and clarity. Joseph de Maistre was perhaps equally influential with his ideas on language, historical upheaval and social evolution. Nevertheless, Starkie's claim could apply to the 1830s, at the height of Ballanche's fame. After 1840, much like Borel, his celebrity and his influence swiftly declined.

Ballanche was a more optimistic thinker than either de Maistre or Borel, but parallels between the depiction of incarceration in *Madame Putiphar*, and *La Ville des*

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[112] Starkie, Enid, *Rimbaud* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1947), p. 111.

expiations, between Borel and Ballanche's ideas on historical evolution, and in some cases, striking similarities in the texts are all abundant. But first we should outline the particular relevance of Ballanche's philosophy to the generation of 1830.

Ballanche modeled his philosophies of history, language and art upon the tropes of classical myth; his major investigation of the artist's role came in the work *Orphée*, often described as a long prose poem (a description that suits much of his work). The implications of the character of Orpheus go far beyond the realm of art, touching upon science and philosophy. In brief, he represents a model of the artist as messiah, bringing his sensitivity and genius to bear on the contemplation of divine correspondence in the material world, and finding his duty in transmitting his vision to the public, thus leading them. Ballanche's image of the poet also contains a necessary element of suffering. He transmits his gifts to his audience at the expense of his reason or his physical well-being. The image would become a staple of French Romanticism. The image of Orpheus's trance-like state in Ballanche's work, during which the character receives his visions and inspiration, informs literature through Romanticism and beyond, in Baudelaire and Rimbaud. Orpheus overcomes the limits of his physical sense, as Rimbaud attempted to push himself to do, and finds his senses elevated. The image foreshadows Baudelaire's 'Elevation':

> Je fus alors saisi d'une sorte de vertige, je m'échappai de la prison de mes organes, mon âme plana sur le monde. Il me sembla que, dans une illusion ravissante, ma pensée assistait au commencement des choses [...]
>
> Les éléments sortaient du chaos avec leurs lois primitives et leurs propriétés, et ces lois gouvernent les atomes et les sphères célestes; et les sphères célestes agissent les unes sur les autres comme les atomes s'attirent et se repoussent.[113]

The importance of a correlation between extreme and liberating experience and literature continues in a very similar sense through the work of the Surrealists. But it was the

[113] Ballanche, *OC*, vol. IV, pp. 435-7.

bousingos and *jeunes-France* who first put this vein of experimentation in literature into practice, albeit in an unsophisticated form. They developed an association between behaviour, dress, political rhetoric, even cuisine and tied them all to artistic goals.

Perhaps the most striking parallel between Borel and Ballanche lies in their common fascination for the depiction of incarceration; much of *Madame Putiphar* can be read as a critique of techniques of reform and imprisonment. There is a clear contrast between the portrayal of Déborah's imprisonment on the island of Sainte-Marguerite, and the abominable treatment of Patrick in various state prisons. While the deplorable conditions of Patrick's incarceration serve only to enhance the injustice committed against him, and to decry the cruelty and arbitrariness of justice meted out at the whim of the king's mistress, the conditions of Déborah's imprisonment work toward an entirely different effect. Borel describes the conditions of the prisoners' lives on the Ile Sainte-Marguerite in juxtaposition to the ecclesiastical lives of the cenobites on the neighboring Ile Saint-Honorat; the monks are as much victims of their own inner turmoil as the prisoners are haunted by their criminal past. Borel uses the connection to note that liberty has little to do with physical condition, but more with freedom of conscience and the redemption of the spirit. 'Qu'est-ce pour le Tout-Puissant qu'une chaîne et qu'un verrouil?'[114] As a prisoner on the Ile Sainte-Marguerite, Déborah, though possessed of a large degree of physical liberty, bears the burden of her conscience and suffers as she reflects on the numerous sources of her guilt:

> La mémoire de ses maux soufferts ne désemparoit pas de son esprit, et son cœur étoit plein de remords et de regrets. Elle s'accusoit du trépas de sa mère et du trépas de Patrick. Il lui sembloit que leurs ombres erroient sans repos autour d'elle et la frôloient. Dans le grincement du verrouil de sa porte agitée, dans le bruit du vent [...] elle croyoit entendre leurs pas ou des plaintes et des gémissements.[115]

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[114]Borel, *Madame Putiphar*, p. 212.

[115]Ibid., p. 214.

Déborah's physical liberty, coupled with the sombre, meditative and ecclesiastical surroundings, all work eventually to force her reflections on past events, and thus indirectly to nurture her own guilt. Conversely, the physical confinement and suffering endured by Patrick engender anger directed almost solely outward, toward the arbitrary causes of his own imprisonment. This juxtaposition of techniques of reform through incarceration corroborates theories set out by Ballanche.

These theories of incarceration, expressed by Ballanche in his work *La Ville des Expiations*, bear striking resemblance to the imprisonment of Déborah on Sainte-Marguerite. The lives of prisoners depicted in Ballanche are often compared to the lives of monks, an identical simile to that found in Borel. Ballanche also iterates the necessity of physical liberty for the prisoners, brought to the isolated city of penance either to serve for crimes committed, or of their own free volition. The prison meets the conditions of expiation as it nurtures reflection and penance based upon the individual prisoner's will to recognise his own guilt. For Ballanche, the prisoner could speed his way through the system by exemplary and self-abasing behaviour. Ballanche explains that the prisoner is best guided toward a recognition of his own guilt through kindness: 'C'est par de bons traitements, par des paroles compatissantes, que vous ferez pénétrer dans l'âme du coupable le remords qui doit racheter son crime.'[116] This system is exemplified in the treatment of Déborah on Sainte-Marguerite by the kind jailer Cogolin; the same lesson is expressed in the contrast between the treatment of prisoners by the cruel jailer de Rougement, who replaces the benevolent Guyonnet at Vincennes. Ballanche also stresses the point that cruel treatment will only nurture a prisoner's anger at the conditions and causes of his imprisonment, as in the case of Patrick. The first step to a prisoner's reform must be a willing acknowledgement of guilt.

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[116]Ibid., p. 5.

Despite her kind treatment on Sainte-Marguerite, and the soul-searching that results, Déborah nurtures as much hatred for her tormentors, de Villepastour and Pharaon, as she feels guilt for her own faults. Ballanche is careful to illustrate how mistreatment of prisoners and arbitrary imprisonment like that found in the novel have an indirectly pernicious effect on society. The nurturing of a sense of guilt in the prisoner as a regulatory mechanism against future transgression is compared to the raising of children. Ballanche illustrates the danger of unforgiveness and of directing blame outward in the fashion of Déborah in an anecdote included in his treatise that bears striking resemblance to Borel's sub-plot involving the death of Déborah's son, Vengeance. Déborah brought up Vengeance with the goal of avenging her husband's disappearance and her own disgrace at the hands of Pharaon and de Villepastour. In Ballanche's anecdote, Charles de Solange, a wealthy aristocrat, raises his son in the best manner with the sole intention that his son should enjoy all of the worldly trappings of high birth and good society. In both cases, the intention behind the parent's raising the child is flawed. Solange's vanity and lack of compassion are direly punished when on one occasion his son reports to him an altercation between two of his young companions in which insults were traded. Solange explains to his son that the rules of honour demand that such an offense be settled only with blood, and continues for nearly a page to chastise the dishonorable conduct of his son's friends. The son, being one of the parties to the altercation, yet lacking the courage to express such to his father once his father's disapproval becomes evident, searches out his friend and provokes him in a duel. In the ensuing contest, the son is killed. There are parallels with the death of Vengeance at the hands of Villepastour: Déborah too recounts to Vengeance the ignominious treatment of her and her husband, seemingly unaware that such a revelation will throw her son into a frenzied and fatal quest for revenge. Both authors recount the careful nurturing by a doting parent of a child for whom they have envisaged a glorious future, albeit motivated

by flawed principles (vanity in the case of de Solange and vengeance in the case of Déborah); neither son achieves the greatness expected; both are killed in duels, brought about by the faults of their parents. A curious footnote reinforces the connection between Ballanche's anecdote and Borel's novel. In Borel's description of the coach ride in which Sade and Patrick are transferred to the Bastille, the third passenger is Solange.[117]

Ballanche's theories on social evolution, and upon a providential scheme that guides the progress of man share certain elements with those Borel and de Maistre. Ballanche describes his poetic, mystical experience as having afforded him a glimpse of the workings of Providence:

> Je devins [...] cet homme universel dispersé par la génération; je me sentis successif, de stable et de permanent que j'aurais dû être; et je compris comment Prométhée a été dit avoir fait l'homme; mais je compris en même temps qu'il n'avait résolu qu'une moitié du problème, celle de la responsabilité [...]
>
> Je compris ainsi la raison des épreuves de l'humanité, épreuves dont les mystères d'Isis offrent une image.[118]

The 'épreuves de l'humanité' refers to expiation. This concept formed the cornerstone of Ballanche's philosophy, and was shared with de Maistre and Borel. The character of Antigone provides the classical model of expiation within Ballanche's moral framework, 'la victime pure et expiatoire'. She redeems her race through her trials, and on many occasions Borel, too, compares his heroine, Déborah, to Antigone.

Ballanche's speculation on historical evolution relies upon a historical process that he termed 'palingénésie'. The word had been in existence long before Ballanche began publishing, but with the popularity of Ballanche's work, it took on nuances it had not before shown. 'Palingénésie' describes a concept of history similar to an unsophisticated version of dialectical materialism. There is something of Hegel in this vein of philosophy that held the germs of Marxism. The term comprises Ballanche's

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[117]Ibid., p. 313

[118] Ballanche, *OC*, vol. IV, p. 437.

concept of historical evolution through the cyclical clash of opposing social forces. Ballanche's dialectic involves the conservative or patrician class in constant opposition to the plebeian or dynamic element. Though elegantly elaborated, Ballanche's system bears none of the exactitude or sophistication of a model based on even the most rudimentary political, historical or socio-economic observation. Instead, like de Maistre, he relies on the communality and persistence of myth as evidence of the 'truth' of his work. In this sense, Ballanche's thinking is deeply reactionary. Like de Maistre, his social philosophy eschews evidence; Ballanche's thinking pertains more to the realms of myth and literature, and it was here that both he and de Maistre had the most durable influence:

> La pensée du philosophe se plaît à quitter le terrain solide des faits pour s'envoler au delà des réalités terrestres dans le monde des idées éternelles.[119]

Because of this grounding in mythical tropes, Ballanche's work is easily applied to literary criticism, and it is probably in the realm of literature that he exercised his strongest influence.

Ballanche borrowed a conception of the spiritual hierarchy of beings from the eighteenth century philosopher Bonnet.[120] Humanity survived on the cusp between animality, or domination by the flesh, and pure intellectuality. From this premise, Bonnet created another hierarchy, along which humanity was divided, beginning from the lowest and least spiritual, *l'homme brut*, and upward toward the most intellectual and therefore the most divine, *l'homme pensant*. The evolution toward intellectual perfection and thus divinity that Bonnet had described for the individual, Ballanche had attempted to elaborate in terms of societies. Ballanche saw humanity guided by God through a series of trials whose existence served as proof, in themselves, of man's perfectibility. The end result of man's evolution was anticipated by Ballanche as civil liberty. Although

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[119] Ballanche, Pierre-Simon, *Le Vieillard et le jeune homme* (Paris: Librairie Félix Alcan, 1929), p. 3.

[120] Bonnet, Charles, *La palingénésie philosophique*, 2 vols. (Geneva: Bruyset, 1770).

Ballanche was often placed in the camp of the *ultras* by his adversaries, and although he frequented the salon of Madame Récamier and had much commerce with intellectual conservatism, he was not so easily classified. He supported monarchy, but saw it only as a legitimate and necessary step up the ladder of society's evolution.

Borel shared much with Ballanche, but not his eclectic optimism. Borel parodied the idea that God employed 'le peuple' as his perfectible instrument:

> Enfin Dieu, trouvant sans doute son outil suffisamment trempé et affûté, décidément l'emmancha, et le mit à la besogne.[121]

As we have seen, Borel's description of popular uprising, and particularly of the storming of the Bastille, portrayed the 'peuple' as self-destructive. The fury of the revolutionary crowds was self-propagating and at the same time degrading. The blood sacrifice of the revolution appeased the sense of justice of a malevolent deity, but there is no greater sense in *Madame Putiphar* that catastrophe contributes to moral progress.

There is thus little to be said for the twentieth-century conception of Borel as an *esprit révolutionnaire* (according to Eluard) or as a Marxist *avant la lettre* (Breton, Tzara, Steinmetz). He was extremely critical of the destructive dynamics of revolution just as he was pessimistic about human 'perfectibility'. Borel was also sympathetic to the ideas of some of the most conservative and eclectic post-Revolutionary thinkers. In the final analysis, he was a provocateur who borrowed freely and without deep consideration from the prominent philosophy of the day. Borel's most interesting efforts were not profound considerations of philosophy and political revolution, but were confined to the context of art, and speculation on the artist's role.

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[121]Borel, *Madame Putiphar*, p. 268.

The Later Years of the Lycanthrope

After writing *Madame Putiphar*, Borel spent the next five years in Paris working in journalism. He founded the satirical political and literary review *Le Satan*, later to become *Le Corsaire-Satan*, vehicle for the talents of a young Baudelaire. It was in the offices of the *Corsaire-Satan* in the early 1840s that Baudelaire first saw and was struck by the faded nobility and eccentric costume of the ageing and resigned Borel. According to Baudelaire, he was at that point an almost forgotten star whose name carried with it vague images of the turbulent years when the political and the journalistic were mixed inextricably with the gruesome *roman-charogne* style of Romanticism.[122] Yet Baudelaire's portrait carries with it a note of surprise and curiosity: how could a young man known for his virulent polemicism, and his confrontational rhetoric have become the quiet and prematurely aged figure that Baudelaire occasionally passed in the corridors of the magazine's office?

Borel's work in the intervening years, between the publication of *Madame Putiphar* and his self-imposed exile in Mostaganem, bear witness to the profound change in his view of literature. He appeared content in these years to earn a modest living writing theatrical reviews, and humorous sketches. The vitriol had passed almost entirely out of his writing, as though the effort of creating *Madame Putiphar* had exhausted him, and the disappointment of its having passed almost unnoticed before the public and critics had discouraged him entirely from beginning another major work. Admittedly, Borel had never exhibited the stamina or the sustained concentration to write a successful novel. In addition, the duplicity and propensity of his narrative voice for 'confrontation' meant that he was unlikely to endear himself immediately to his reading public or achieve

[122]Baudelaire, Charles, *OC*, II p. 314.

quick commercial success; his style, though less provocative than in earlier works, certainly impeded the average reader finishing a novel like *Madame Putiphar*. His talents were better adapted to the short story, satire and brief caricatural essays, and he continued to pursue these forms. But there is little hint in his later work of sustained focus upon problems of the rôle of the artist or of the reception of art. 'Jeanniquette', a short story published right after *Madame Putiphar* is a strictly melodramatic offering.[123] 'C'est une histoire digne de figurer aux traités de moral en action qu'on propose à l'édification de la jeunesse.'[124] There is no more than a trace of the virulent political rhetoric, the destructive self-portraiture and the ironic deception with regards to his reading public, nor is there a continuation of the horrific and graphic descriptive technique of his earlier work. Borel's black humour, and his sense of irony, both situational and metaphysical, remain in his satirical portraits written for *Les Francais peints par eux-mêmes*– 'Le Gniaffe' and 'Le Croquemort'.[125]

Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to end a portrait of Borel on this note, as has been the trend among previous critics. The tone of tragedy that the apparent failure of *Madame Putiphar* lends to Borel's short and energetic career has been exaggerated. Obviously, Borel's own contradictions led to his abandoning a literary career quite early. But his inability to reconcile the demands of the public, commercial demands, his own polemical tendencies and his fierce sense of artistic integrity led to much more than a premature end to a promising literary career.

In Borel's final work, we find that the neglected bard, 'ignoré, farouche' was a model of artistic integrity that no longer coincided with the relationship he wished to maintain with his readership as he grew older. When one considers the contemporary

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[123] 'Jeanniquette', in *Le Messager*, 23-24 July, 1839.

[124] Marie, Artistide, op. cit., p. 121.

[125] Borel, Pétrus, 'Le Croquemort', in *Les Français peints par eux-mêmes, encyclopédie morale du dix-neuvième siècle*, vol. II, 121-33; 'Le Gniaffe', ibid., vol. IV, pp. 373-85

political and literary climate, *Madame Putiphar* appears ideal both in subject matter and in genre to capture the public's attention. Making sense of the legacy of the Revolution of 1789 was such a common literary endeavour, there is no need to list the hundreds of sources - but among the *bousingos* and *jeunes-France*, there were very specific ideas that were popular, and that dealt with the political and philosophical heritage of the trauma of the Revolution. Ballanche, de Maistre and Saint-Simon were all widely cited in the artistic and political press. *La Jeune France* and even *L'Artiste* made frequent reference to Ballanche's theories of history, particularly those concerning expiation and the concept of *palingénésie*. These concepts reflected popular sentiment, but also carried credence with the avant-garde literary *milieux*.

With his celebrity on the wane and living in near poverty, Borel needed something dramatic once again to catch the public's attention, and melodrama afforded him the chance. There is more than a coincidence in Borel's adaptation of the theme and many of the scenes from Pixerécourt's last play. *Latude*'s success was considerable, but more than the commercial success was the widely acknowledged emotional impact of Pixerécourt's plays that likely attracted Borel to the form and subject matter. He had always invested a part of his artistic identity in provoking a strong reaction in his audience.

Despite the popularity of the genre and the subject-matter, and despite the incorporation of ideas of de Maistre's and Ballanche's that were respected in literary circles, Borel still appeared unable, in *Madame Putiphar*, to set the appropriate tone for his public, either of intimacy or of provocation. But this inability (or perhaps unwillingness) should not be seen as a failure. Borel's struggle, in *Madame Putiphar* as well as in earlier works, and his contentious relationship with his audience assured him a permanent legacy in the nineteenth century. His dark irony, and his splintering authorial persona in *Champavert* and *Rhapsodies*, become more starkly visible when his intentions

move in an entirely opposite direction in *Madame Putiphar*. And even the apparent failure of this last effort to please his audience, in its sheer unreadability and grotesqueness, reveals that something remained of the provocative duplicity and frenetic verve that made Borel *épique* and *hénaurme* respectively for Baudelaire and for Flaubert.

Chapter 5

The Legacy of Pétrus Borel

The question at this point is how to gauge Borel's importance and his influence. Although Borel does not stand alone as a defining moment of innovation in nineteenth-century literature, it is clear that he initiated a particular form of speculation about the role of the artist in society during his short but frenzied career. At some point in the 1830s literature began to shift from the grandiloquence of the first generation of Romantics, to the austere formalism of the *Parnasse*. As Enid Starkie points out, the seeds of Realism, Symbolism and later movements were sown during this period of upheaval. I have demonstrated that the beginnings of this transition were due to debate on the artist's role and experimentation with forms of irony and narrative. Borel is important not because his work encapsulates a great number of the changes that literature experienced during this period (though he did epitomise an off-shoot of the romantic school); he is important because he was considered a major player on the literary scene for a few years, and his fortunes waned not before he had the chance to make a distinct impression on artists who would play a major role in changing the currents of nineteenth-century literature. Thus, it is important to anchor speculation about Borel's influence upon later authors within his historical and cultural context.

Borel shares a number of similarities with other authors in the nineteenth century who displayed a sense of black humour, who detailed cruelties, and who pursued a course of frenzied rebellion in the face of overwhelming public censure. It was during the 1830s that the bourgeoisie became the target of so much literary vitriol. A critic of the early twentieth century, Jean de Gourmont, summarises Borel's contribution. De Gourmont extends the influence of Borel across the century, identifying him as one of the primary sources of the typical hatred the nineteenth-century artist displayed toward the bourgeois.

> De sa vindicte et de ses sarcasmes [..] naîtra le légendaire antagonisme qui, pendant tout le siècle, armera les artistes contre le bourgeois et le philistin; qui doit se prolonger sous l'ironie d'un Balzac, d'un Flaubert, d'un Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, puis sous le stigmate caricatural des Daumier, des Monnier, de Gavarni.[1]

Among all critics of Borel, this 'truculente intensité' is widely understood to inform the work of later and superior authors. But in most cases Borel's influence is so difficult to judge that no critic has devoted serious study to the matter. However, this does not mean that lines of affiliation should not at least be sketched out.

Baudelaire was certainly inspired by Borel's morbid tones, as he was fascinated by the tragic figure that the latter cut in the offices of the *Corsaire-Satan* in the 1840s. Symbolist authors recognised in Borel an early example of the 'poète maudit', one whose actions and writing went against society's grain, and who was doomed to be misunderstood in his lifetime. But there is little concrete evidence of literary borrowing beyond a number of perhaps coincidental attitudes. There is conceivably a line of literary parentage that connects Borel, Baudelaire, Corbière, Rimbaud, Laforgue and others, a line upon which Enid Starkie had once hoped to elaborate.[2] Borel and Rimbaud shared an energetic and short-lived rebellion that ended in their retreat to Africa. If we look hard enough, we can find something of Borel in Huysmans and Mirabeau, in Laforgue,

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[1] de Gourmont, Jean, 'Revue de la quinzaine' in *Mercure de France*, CLXI, January-February, 1923, pp. 747-748.

[2] Starkie, Enid, *Pétrus Borel the Lycanthrope*, p. 16.

Lautréamont, Villiers de l'Isle-Adam and a number of others who did or could fall under the epithet 'poète maudit'. But such speculation would move too far beyond the historical context that forms the basis of this thesis's methodology; these comparisons must remain the material of later studies.

There are however two clear instances of literary parentage that are substantial and demand a detailed analysis. Flaubert frequently admitted a debt to Borel that is quite clear in his juvenilia. Flaubert's early short stories distinctly reflect an immersion in the literature of the *jeunes-France*, and display many of the lycanthrope's provocative attitudes. Borel's influence on Flaubert, when explored, begins to clarify the former's place in the nineteenth century. Borel was one of the few artists among the second generation of romantics to highlight the conditions and moral contexts of the artist's role. And he was certainly among the most celebrated artists to do so in his day. As I shall demonstrate, Borel's example served as one of the steps in Flaubert's development of the tropes of 'Realism'.

Similarly, the Surrealists admit a debt to Borel, and profess an admiration of his 'politicisation' of artistic rebellion. Tzara, Eluard and Breton typify the attempts to resurrect the projects of the *jeunes-France* and *bousingo* in this century. Their concern was less for the details of Borel's rhetoric, or for the dialogue in which he participated in the press and his exploration of his relationship to his literary persona and reading public; instead the Surrealists were fascinated with what they saw as the extra-literary component of the *bousingo* attitudes. Tzara, in particular, felt that the *bousingo* pointed the way for literature as an 'engaged' art form. The *bousingo* brought art out of the text, and used his provocative habits as a performance to challenge elements of conservatism. Unfortunately, the Surrealist approach ignores the political complexities of the 1830s, or the nature of artistic debate during this period. Eluard and Tzara in particular apply Marxist categories to a situation that is not entirely suited to techniques of analysis that

draw on the categories of later nineteenth and early twentieth-century debate. Conversely, Breton comes to grips with some of the questions concerning the charged and dynamic relationship between author and reader that are vital to an understanding of Borel. His definition of 'l'humour noir' precludes a strictly political analysis of Borel's contribution to literature. Breton recognises the destructive properties of Borel's negative irony, and applies his observations to the experience of the reader.

We will first turn to an examination of the more substantial literary relationship between Flaubert and Borel. It is remarkable not only for the similarity between Borel's work and much of the very early work of Flaubert, but also for the fact that it has been ignored for so long.[3]

The Nature and Substance of Borel's Influence on Flaubert

The period following the celebrity of the *jeunes-France* saw a break with the grandiloquence of the first generation of Romantics as well as a move away from political idealism. Yet there was certainly not a perfectly smooth transition from the sentimentality of high Romanticism to the rigid formalism of the Parnasse. The links from Borel's period to later authors can be traced to the fact that the subjects treated in French literature in the nineteenth century often suggested or proclaimed a study of the artist's vocation. The novel of education such as *L'Education sentimentale*, or the panorama of Western spiritual thought in Flaubert's *La Tentation de Sainte Antoine*, even the poems of Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du Mal* all expressed, to a greater or lesser degree, and with more or less irony, an artist's relationship to his vocation. Borel played a not

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[3] Mario Praz comments very briefly on Borel and Flaubert in *The Romantic Agony* (London: OUP, 1933), pp. 156-7. He notes the similarity between the morbidity and graphic description in Borel and the early work of Flaubert.

unimportant role in the development of this preoccupation; although he did not pursue his ideas to maturity, those that he initiated heralded the importance of stylistic and formal themes that dominated the century. He thus represents an often neglected turning point.

Though Borel was not the first or the only figure to signal a move away from the unabashed sentimentality of the early Romantics, and to develop elements of Socratic irony in his work, he was among the most influential authors to do so *in his day*. His influence upon Flaubert in particular is indisputable. Flaubert was among the authors upon whom Borel exercised the most concrete and direct influence. Flaubert admits, in numerous letters, the inspiration he gained from Borel. In a letter to Louise Colet dated 2 January, 1854, Flaubert recounts the inspiration he draws from Borel while at work on *Madame Bovary*:

> Je suis maintenant dans des lectures bien diverses. D'abord, je me *gaudys* avec Pétrus Borel qui est *hénaurme*; je trouve là mes vieilles phrénésies de jeunesse! Cela valait mieux que la monnaie courante d'à présent.[4]

Flaubert describes his work in progress for *Salammbô* as resembling Borel in a letter to Ernest Feydeau dated from the end of November, 1857:

> [...] je passe alternativement de l'emphase la plus extravagante à la platitude la plus académique. Cela sent tout à tour le Pétrus Borel et le Jacques Delille.[5]

And in another letter to Feydeau, dated 31 August, 1861, Flaubert mentions Borel again, in reference to the same work in progress:

> J'arrive aux tons un peu foncés. On commence à marcher dans les tripes et à br_ler les moutards. Baudelaire sera content! et l'ombre de Pétrus Borel, blanche et innocente comme la face de Pierrot, en sera peut-être jalouse.[6]

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[4]Flaubert, Gustave, *Correspondance*, vol. IV, p. 3.

[5]Ibid., p. 239.

[6]Ibid., pp. 454-5.

In a letter to Léon Hennique, Flaubert begins a list of recommended authors who best embody the spirit of the 1830s with the name of Borel.[7] The short list also includes 'Lascailly' [sic].

Any study of Flaubert and Borel should begin with the former's 'vieilles phrénésies de jeunesse' where a remarkable number of pastiches of Borel are to be found. Strangely, comparatively little work has been focused on the adolescent literature of Flaubert, in distinct contrast to the large library of criticism of his mature work. Studies of Flaubert's youth have often focused upon his biography. A number of critics agree that a formative event in Flaubert's life was a severe crisis of faith in his adolescence, aggravated perhaps by his slow intellectual development as a child, and by a possible linguistic handicap. Few critics disagree with the importance of the portrait of the young Flaubert as exhaustively painted in Sartre's *L'Idiot de la famille*, though many may dispute the details of its interpretation.[8] The traumas that Flaubert experienced, and the impressions that he received from the authors whom he admired, indelibly marked his work. In this chapter, I shall concentrate on the literary influences of Flaubert's youth, and leave much of the biographical speculation aside. His adolescent literature shows a similar frenzied rebellion, cynicism and irony to that found throughout Borel; he wanted to embark upon a literary career with the intention of becoming a 'démoralisateur'.[9] As I shall shortly demonstrate, much of the common ground shared by the young Flaubert and by Borel comes from their common desire to reveal the sordid aspects of society, to shock and discourage their readers, and to cause the reader to question his moral opinions. In this way, writings of the adolescent Flaubert were unmistakably marked by the *jeune-France* and *bousingo* fashion of the early 1830s; apart from his early

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[7]Ibid., vol. VIII, p. 369.

[8] Sartre, Jean-Paul, *L'Idiot de la famille* (Paris: Gallimard, 1971).

[9]Flaubert, Gustave, *Correspondance*, ed. Jean Bruneau, 2 vols. (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1973, 1980), vol. I, p. 37.

rebelliousness and freneticism, his morbidity and many of his stylistic preoccupations came directly from the artistic and political polemics of the first half of the 1830s. It is quite possible that Flaubert's attitudes could have arisen as easily from his immersion in and imitation of *bousingo* trends as from some affective childhood trauma. Flaubert gives a clue to the birth of his preoccupations in a letter to Louise Colet from November, 1851:

> Le secret de tout ce qui vous étonne en moi est dans ce passé de ma vie intérieure que personne ne connaît.[10]

'[V]ie intérieure' could mean 'intellectual development' as well as 'emotional formation'. In another letter to Colet, Flaubert explains his secret attitudes:

> [...] comme une intimité, comme une maladie honteuse de l'intérieur que j'ai gagnée pour avoir frequenté des choses malsaines.[11]

The 'choses malsaines' quite likely included a copious diet of Borel, Gautier, O'Neddy and their friends, in addition to the young Flaubert's apparent taste for prostitutes.

Flaubert describes the proclivities of his literary alter-ego in *Novembre*:

> Dans sa première jeunesse, il s'était nourri de très mauvais auteurs, comme on l'a pu voir à son style.[12]

In the same work, Flaubert notes that the childhood suffering of his loosely autobiographical persona is as much a literary pose as a reaction to any trauma suffered:

> De quoi se plaindre pourtant? Et qui vous rend si sombre à l'âge où tout sourit? N'avez-vous pas d'amis tout dévoués, une famille dont vous faites l'orgueil, des bottes vernies, un paletot ouaté, etc.? Rhapsodies poétiques, souvenirs de mauvaises lectures, hyperboles de rhétorique, que toutes ces grandes douleurs sans nom [...]

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[10] Cited in Vuillemin, 'Preface' to Flaubert, Gustave, *Novembre* (Neuchâtel: Ides et Calendes, 1961), p. 8.

[11] Flaubert, *Correspondance* (Paris: Conard, 1910), vol. I, p.78.

[12] Flaubert, *Novembre*, p. 160.

His spelling of the word 'rhapsodies' is unusual for the period, when 'rapsodies' was the common form. The orthography was almost unique to Borel's volume of poetry. As we have seen, Borel was ridiculed in the press for his capricious spelling of the same word. Similarly, rhetorical hyperbole was the trademark of the lycanthrope.

The above description of Flaubert's literary persona's mysterious suffering is as much an ironic mimicking of the voices of parental concern and 'good sense' as a true indicator of his tastes. He may look back on his literary posing with some measure of self-conscious disdain, but this in no way impinges on the significance of *jeune-France* literature in influencing the formation of his work. There is certainly a relationship between Flaubert's childhood unhappiness and his literary tastes, despite the ironic dismissal of his attitudes as ephemeral moods brought on by a poor literary diet.

Shared Attitudes, Philosophical Premises and Thematic Considerations in the Early Work of Flaubert and the Work of Borel

The similarities, both stylistic and thematic, between the early writings of Flaubert and the work of Borel are striking. Flaubert was beginning his literary career in the late 1830s and early 1840s, when Borel's name had not yet been forgotten by the public, and *jeunes-France* fashion had not yet subsided in the provinces. Both authors are preoccupied with the philosophical quandaries arising from the presence of evil in the world. For Flaubert, the problem leads to a surprising depth of analysis, even in his early work; for Borel the existence of evil served primarly as a rhetorical lever in his attacks on the bourgeoisie and as a stylistic pose. In addition, the early work of Flaubert exhibits the exacerbated morbidity of the charnel-house school of which Borel was a master. Flaubert's juvenilia contain profuse depictions of murder, rape, cruelty, premature burial,

and a number of other themes dear to the author of *Champavert*. Both authors explore the relationship of author to text, and of author to reader, in addition to exploiting irony to suggest these relations. Flaubert in his youth showed nearly as much elusiveness toward his readership, and as much self-consciousness about the possible reception of his work, as did Borel. Flaubert also adopted the *jeune-France* antipathy toward the middle-class reader, and, more significantly, toward the development of the commercial and industrial aspects of the literary profession.

Both Borel and Flaubert, from an early age, resented equally the developing correlation between art and commerce, although the young Flaubert's resentment of the developing relations between art and industry was less virulent than Borel's. In his later work, Flaubert developed this disdain along his own lines as typified in the 'art industriel' of the second version of *L'Education sentimentale*. But even at a very early stage, utilitarianism in art, and industrial manufacture were, for Flaubert, equally dangerous:

> Je vous abandonne de grand cœur le luxe, le commerce, l'industrie, les ports et les manufactures, les étoffes et les métaux [...] votre bon sens m'assomme, votre positif me fait horreur.[13]

Flaubert shared the *bousingo* desire to be free from commercial pressures in the practice of his art, and quite likely learned the reasoning behind this early distaste in *bousingo* works. Obviously, Flaubert was not struggling with the financial side of the literary profession at such a young age, as were Borel and his followers in Paris. His attitude is more likely to have been modelled on that of the authors he admired, and was not shaped by direct experience until some years after his move to Paris.

Without necessarily being subjected to the turmoil of the professional side of artistic creation and reception that Borel knew, the young Flaubert mimicked many of the

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[13]Flaubert, *Œuvres de jeunesse inédites*, 4 vols. (Paris: Conard, 1910), vol. I, p. 134.

literary strategies that were, for Borel, a means of combatting the perils of public scrutiny and critical reception. Though his attitudes and techniques undergo substantial transformation, certain Borelian elements are clearly evident throughout his mature work: the abrupt and disillusioning changes in narrative perspective at the conclusion of works such as *L'Education sentimentale* or *Madame Bovary*, or the graphic depictions of violence in *Salammbô*. In Flaubert, one sees the fascination with morbid detail apparent in Borel's short stories; both Flaubert and Borel find cruel joy in the revelation and detailed depiction of society's more sordid aspects: 'Disséquer est une vengeance!'[14] This common trait is coupled with techniques of narrative de-dramatisation that augment the irony of both authors' work, and that lend to much of their literature the structure of a cruel joke; the similarities are most pronounced in the short stories that Flaubert wrote in his youth, which contain many of the pathetic and horrific elements of Borel's fiction.

The Idea of Evil in Borel and Flaubert

According to Timothy Unwin, the organising principle of Flaubert's early epistemology is the idea of evil.[15] It is one of the major points of intersection between the early work of Flaubert and the work of Borel. Both authors depict a world controlled by an at times invisible, but nonetheless powerful and destructive force of destiny. A malevolent deity oversees the destinies of men, playing with their lives and enjoying the spectacle of their suffering. Borel offered the spectacle of a cruel and sadistic fate as we have seen in his early poem 'Rêveries':

> Un ogre appelé Dieu vous garde un autre sort!
> Moins de prétentions, allons, race servile,

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[14]Flaubert, *OC*, vol. XV, p. 347.

[15] The philosophical basis to Flaubert's early work is considered in depth in Unwin's book *Art et infini, l'œuvre de jeunesse de Flaubert* (Amsterdam: Rodolph, 1991).

> Peut-être avant longtemps votre tête de mort
> Servira de jouet aux enfans par la ville!...[16]

Borel's malevolent, ogre-like deity find echoes throughout the early Flaubert, as in the following citation from 'Un parfum à sentir' written in 1836:

> Cette divinité sombre [...] les presse tous dans sa main de fer comme un géant qui jongle avec des crânes desséchés![17]

A similar fatality forms the philosophical basis for Flaubert's early work, 'Rêve d'enfer' from 1837:

> [les hommes] enfin s'étaient pressés, entassés et remués dans cette immense cohue, dans ce long cri d'angoisse, dans ce prodigieux bourbier qu'on nomme la vie.[18]
>
> La vie de l'homme est comme une malédiction partie de la poitrine d'un géant, et qui va se briser de rochers en rochers en mourant à chaque vibration qui retentit dans les airs.[19]

In the Champavertesque philosophical musings of Flaubert's 'Agonies, pensées sceptiques', a malicious and sadistic god toys with the lives of men as a child plays with insects:

> Le Dieu qui s'amuserait à tenter les hommes pour voir jusqu'où ils peuvent souffrir, ne serait-il pas aussi cruellement stupide qu'un enfant qui, sachant que le hanneton va mourir, lui arrache d'abord les ailes, puis les pattes, puis la tête?[20]

The level of detail in these metaphors of cruelty informs the explicit depictions of suffering and violence in both Borel and the young Flaubert. The explicitness is a development of the Romantic idea of the grotesque, which incorporates and enhances the

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[16] Borel, *Rhapsodies*, p. 98.

[17] Flaubert, *Œuvres de jeunesse inédites*, vol. I, p. 70.

[18] Flaubert, ibid., p. 166.

[19] Ibid., p. 404.

[20] Ibid., p. 454.

shocking irony that Borel had developed in many of his short stories, and which continues to be employed in the early work of Flaubert.

Instances of pessimism expressed in such Borelian terms, and going beyond a simple fatalism, are almost too numerous to list in the work of Flaubert. The strange logic of Champavert's murder/suicide and infanticide is echoed in Flaubert's thoughts: 'Il pensait sérieusement qu'il y a moins de mal à tuer un homme qu'à faire un enfant.'[21] There are occasional references to a Saturnian orality, as expressed in so much of Borel's writing. In Flaubert's short work, 'La Femme du monde', the daughter of Satan explains her designs on the world:

> [...] je broyais avec avidité, sous mes dents, brillante jeunesse, empire puissant, siècles pleins de gloire et d'honneur, rois, empéreurs; j'effaçais leur blason, leur gloire, et, dans mes mains déchaînées, je réduisais en poudre le sceptre doré aussi facilement que la houlette du pasteur.[22]

Like Borel, and like many of the *jeunes-France*, the young Flaubert portrayed death not as the liberating martyrdom of high Romanticism, but as a vertiginous and fearful 'néant', beyond which there was no afterlife, and no moral arbitration. Although Flaubert employs Christian allegories with some frequency, principles and characters inspired by Borel preside over his moral universe: there is little room in it for Christian salvation.

Flaubert's adolescent cynicism engenders numerous portrayals of Christian good versus evil, as in the allegorical, fantastic short stories 'Voyage en enfer', 'La Femme du monde', or 'Smarh'; in each story evil and the grotesque finally triumph over mankind or over figures representing Christian salvation. The character of Satan is a recurring figure, typically working to tempt and mislead; yet Flaubert's principle of evil is not

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[21] Flaubert, *Novembre*, p. 163.

[22] Flaubert, *Œuvres de jeunesse*, vol. II, p. 110.

always characterised by the scheming, Faustian Satan. It is often the Borelian ogre, a principle of destruction that recklessly consumes all good works.

In 'Rêve d'enfer', the contrast between the Faustian Satan, and the destructive and demoralising principle of evil, becomes starkly apparent.[23] Arthur d'Almaroës, a mysterious alchemist, has accidentally summoned Satan through his experiments. Tired of life, the alchemist claims that he has no soul. Almaroës represents the figure of the mystical sage, whose erudition separates him from the common run of men; the same symbolics of erudition that I have discussed in the context of the work of Borel are apparent in Flaubert. Like Borel's characters Andréa Vésalius or Three-Fingered Jack, he reveals the cynical yet visionary traits of the lycanthrope. Isolated and elevated in the Romantic mould, he nevertheless does not share the Romantic exuberance in martyrdom. He is soulless and wicked.

Almaroës longs for 'le néant' that death will bring. Satan mocks him, and says that he will find a way to make him succumb to temptation. Satan tries all manner of ruses, settling finally on lust as the surest means of snaring the alchemist's soul. The scheme fails spectacularly; the woman whom Satan had enchanted to lure Almaroës commits suicide in her despair over the alchemist's lack of interest. Satan is finally defeated by Almaroës's unassailable cynicism. Without a soul, Almaroës is immune to the desires and moral conundrums of Christianity. His psychological battle with Satan represents the struggle between desire and cynicism; or between positive morality and its constant tension between good and evil on the one hand, and amorality, erudition and irony on the other hand. The principle of evil that oversees the Flaubertian universe is more closely allied to the second, negative phenomenon: a relative of Hegelian, negative irony.

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[23] Ibid., vol. I, p. 162.

The presence of Flaubertian evil in the world precludes the Christian concepts of redemption, salvation and an afterlife. In the wake of cynicism's resounding triumph over Satan, there is little hope for the life of the soul after death. And consequently, the moral weighing of the soul that awaits in the afterlife has little value. All moral arbitration must take place during physical life; and suffering and forebearance are rarely rewarded. This situation is typified in the conclusion to 'Rêve d'enfer'. At the end of the story, Satan has left the earth vanquished by cynicism. Centuries pass, and mankind toils in a world overseen by dark giants whose movements create swirls and eddies of the spirit, like the waters of a tempestuous ocean: 'elles étaient furieuses, montaient dans l'air en tourbillonnant, et le rivage remuait à leurs secousses comme entre les mains d'un géant.'[24] Under the strain of centuries of suffering the sorrowful voice of mankind implores heaven:

> [...] une voix s'élèva de la terre et dit:
>
> Assez! assez! j'ai trop longtemps souffert et ployé les reins, assez! Oh! grâce! ne crée point d'autre monde!
>
> Et une voix douce, pure, mélodieuse comme la voix des anges, s'abattit sur la terre et dit:
>
> Non! non! c'est pour l'éternité, il n'y aura plus d'autre monde![25]

Humanity begs heaven not to create another world, fearing that its suffering would continue, even worsen. The irony lies in the fact that the divinity that responds (though it is not clear whether it is heavenly or satanic) has no intention of offering punishment or reward, or even of ending humanity's suffering. The paradox is enhanced by the nature of the voice itself, 'douce, pure, mélodieuse comme la voix des anges'. The human voice that begs for an end to its trials does not anticipate that the ironic response to its entreaties condemns it to suffer eternally. Further irony lies in the fact that the divine voice has no intention of offering punishment or reward for the suffering, as the Christian

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[24] Ibid., p. 197.

[25] Ibid.

context of the story would lead one to expect. There is no afterlife, no redemption, no reward for human suffering, and apparently no moral to the episode.

A number of stylistic elements flow naturally from this preoccupation with evil, in its negative, ironic form. Among the simplest and most evident is a fascination, common to both Borel and Flaubert, with the physicality of violence and the finality of death. There is a shocking suddenness in both authors' portrayals of violence. Death for both Borel and the young Flaubert is inevitably gruesome. Descriptions of death in Flaubert comprise the physical decomposition of the corpse after which the spirit does not survive. In his short story 'Quidquid volueris' of 1837, with foreshadowings of Baudelaire's 'Une Charogne', he writes :

> [...] cet ange de beauté mourra et deviendra une cadavre, c'est-à-dire une charogne qui pue, et puis un peu de poussière, le néant, de l'air fétide emprisonné dans une tombe.[26]

The contemplation of the nothingness that follows death leads to the same artistic sense of vertigo that followed Flaubert's early contemplation of infinity:

> [...] et alors le vertige vous prend et l'on se sent entraîné vers un gouffre incommensurable, au fond duquel on entend vibrer un gigantesque rire de damné.[27]

Borel responded with the same hellish laughter when faced with annihilation: 'J'ai caressé la mort, riant au suicide.'[28] This same 'rire de damné' would later come to characterise Borel's 'humour noir' in the book by André Breton.[29]

The ever-present malice that defines the young Flaubert's literary universe is equally expressed in the deformed physical attributes of the characters. The young

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[26] Ibid., p. 232.

[27] Ibid., p. 217.

[28] Borel, *Rhapsodies*, p. 111.

[29] Breton, André, *Anthologie de l'humour noir* (Paris: Pauvert, 1966).

Flaubert shares with Borel, and with many other Romantics, the darkly ironic mixture of the hideous and the endearing or comical. The character of Marguerite, the street performer from 'Un parfum à sentir', is a mixture of endearing passion and repulsive ugliness. The theme of the grotesque character whose trials are on display in a sideshow is equally reminiscent of Hugo's Gwynplaine in *L'Homme qui rit*. But the exaggerated morbidity of Flaubert's early short stories has a particularly *bousingo* flavour, and we must keep constantly in mind that, during the early 1830s, Borel was regarded by many as the talent that would dethrone Hugo! Another grotesque character, Djalioh, the man-ape from 'Quidquid volueris', displays a vast, artistic soul in the body of a deformed animal. Perhaps the most developed and pure expression of the concept of the grotesque in Flaubert is Yuk, the buffoon in the novella 'Smarh'. A precursor of Flaubert's *La Tentation de Saint Antoine*, the novella chronicles the education of the principal character, Smarh, a hermit, at the hands of Satan and of Yuk. Satan plays the Faustian tempter, who also sows the seeds of fear and disillusion:

> Il existe, le néant, car la science n'est pas [...] Oh! l'horrible mystère de tout cela, si tu le connaissais! ta peau deviendrait froide, et tes cheveux se dresseraient, et tu mourrais, épouvanté de tes pensées.[30]

Yet the most intriguing and powerful character in the story is Yuk, who represents the grotesque. When asked by the personification of death who he is, Yuk replies:

> [...] je suis le vrai, je suis l'éternel, je suis le bouffon, le grotesque, le laid [...][31]

In the end, Satan's teachings have disillusioned Smarh to such an extent that he decides to become a poet. The trio of Satan, Smarh and Yuk court death, represented by a beautiful woman, but in the end she is drawn to Yuk. He is the grotesqueness, the

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[30] Flaubert, *Œuvres de jeunesse*, vol. II, p. 42.

[31] Ibid., p. 105.

overarching irony that lends cohesion to the allegorical characters in the story; and when coupled with death, he is the truth:.

> [...] un rire perça l'air, Yuk parut et lui dit:
> --C'est pour moi [la mort], à toi l'éternité!
> L'éternité en effet répéta: 'C'est lui, c'est lui!'
> Smarh tournoya dans le néant, il y roule encore.
> Satan versa une larme.Yuk se mit à rire et sauta sur elle [la mort], et l'étreignit d'un baiser si fort, si terrible, qu'elle étouffa dans les bras du monstre éternel.[32]

Death is consumed by and eternally coupled with the grotesque.

Irony and the grotesque were indissociable for the second generation of romantics. It was an aesthetic principle for which they militated in the wake of Hugo's preface to *Cromwell*. The ironic nature of the grotesque, in romantic terms, was that it held the reader or spectator in a state of uncertainty, between repulsion and fascination. The sense of sublime and horrifying elevation that comes from a mix of the pathetic and sympathetic is similarly one of the conerstones of Flaubert's irony. The grotesqueness of Marguerite is a key example. Her character elicits a paradoxical mix of pity and repulsion. The paradox makes it difficult for one to judge properly the moral context of her story. The clues to a possible, concrete moral interpretation of the story are obscured by the anomalous mixture of character traits—is the character's suffering worthy of recompense, or is it presented as a pathetic side-show? Should the reader anticipate reward or rebuke for the characters? The narrator's description of Marguerite in the following passage from 'Un parfum à sentir' exemplifies the reader's dilemma when faced with this sort of character and moral situation:

> A voir cette femme laide et couverte de haillons embrasser avec tant d'amour cet homme qui la repoussait comme par un sentiment naturel, à voir cette misère et cette tendresse, c'était un spectacle hideux et sublime.[33]

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[32] Ibid., p. 119.

[33] Ibid., vol. I, p. 76.

The horrific impression that Marguerite's paradox conveys is exacerbated by the explicit physical violence of which she is victim. Her husband, Pedrillo, in a fit of rage, throws her into a cage with the carnival lion. She is severely mauled and left more hideously disfigured than before. The scenes of Marguerite's degradation are similar to Borel's depiction of Apolline's excruciating pregnancy, her abandonment and descent into madness in 'Monsieur de l'Argentière'. A sense of sympathy for Apolline's plight is tempered by the horror of the description of her emaciated body and her feeble attempts to nourish her child. She is forced to eat grass and leather; she is wracked with convulsive and epileptic spasms. There is a disturbing mixture of tenderness and revulsion in Apolline's treatment of her own child that reflects the text's immanent paradox:

> A la vue de son enfant, sa sombre folie se réveilla, et retrempa ses forces: dressée sur ses pieds, elle l'embrassait et le frappait tour à tour; elle lui donnait ses mamelles vides; elle le jetait à terre, pleurait, et se couchait sur lui.[34]

The grotesque events and pathetic destinies that Flaubert paints depict not only the principle of evil that he sees governing the universe, they also reveal the nature of his relationship to his artistic vocation. Within his stories he often includes portraits of characters with whom there is reason to suppose that he identifies artistically, much as Borel had done with Three-Fingered Jack, *l'obiman*, Don Andréa Vésalius or Champavert himself. These character types, and the roles that they play, owe a great deal to the work of Borel.

Both Borel and Flaubert employ the image of the anatomist to similar ends. The anatomist is at once the dissecter and consequently a demoralising force; and he is simultaneously a revealer of hidden truths and a symbol of privileged knowledge. His ability to cut through flesh and reveal the inner workings of a human being place him in a

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[34] Borel, *Champavert*, p. 72.

moral position above the rest of humanity. In Borel, the two characters who enjoyed privileged, even supernatural knowledge of the world, Three Fingered Jack and Andréa Vésalius, were the objects of popular awe and suspicion. The obiman and the anatomist each represented an occult science that threatened the moral *status quo*. Borel underlines this threat in his portrait of the people rising up against Vésalius, driven by religion and 'good sense', or again in his depiction of the manhunt organised by local authorities to capture and kill Three Fingered Jack. Both characters enjoy authorial sympathy in the same degree as they are the focus of popular suspicion within the story. Borel calls Jack a lycanthrope, like himself; his love of liberty and his knowledge of the science of the *obi* set him apart from the common run of men. Flaubert's character, the alchemist Duke Arthur d'Almaroës, is equally the recipient of privileged knowledge of the world, and the target of popular suspicion. Flaubert, like Borel in 'Don Andréa Vésalius, l'anatomiste', ironically depicts the legitimacy and sanctity of popular superstition, and the propensity of 'le peuple' for misinterpretation. The people hold Almaroës in awe, while fearing the nature of his 'science':

> Le peuple (car il faut le citer partout, lui qui est devenu maintenant le plus fort des pouvoirs et la plus sainte des choses, deux mots qui semblent incompatibles si ce n'est à Dieu : la sainteté et la puissance), le peuple était persuadé que c'était un sorcier, un démon, Satan incarné.[35]

Almaroës is a brooding and self-absorbed figure who passes months on end meditating in solitude. His profound and expansive vision of the world engenders a cynicism that is a great burden. He displays no inclination to use his vision for the benefit of mankind, who misunderstand him. His personal, ethical dilemma is identical to that of the lycanthrope.

Privileged knowledge accounts for much of the lycanthrope's conceit and cynicism. For Flaubert, the privilege of the anatomist is a product of the same *jeune-France* morbidity and elitism. In Flaubert's short story of 1839 'Les Funérailles du

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[35] Flaubert, *Œuvres de jeunesse* , vol. I, p. 163-4.

docteur Mathurin', the character, Dr. Mathurin, wishes his own death, suffering from cynicism born of his tendency to see through the people around him, to envisage the workings of their flesh and bones, and to imagine their inevitable and gruesome decomposition:

> Mathurin [...] voyait la peau, la chair sous l'épidermie, la moelle dans les os, et il exhumait de tout cela lambeaux sanglants, pourriture de cœur, et souvent, sur des corps sains, vous découvrait une horrible gangrène.[36]

For both Borel and Flaubert, the science of the anatomist/artist follows a moral obligation that is not the pure and selfless devotion to knowledge of the true scientist. Dark cynicism and a desire for vengeance upon an uncomprehending society spur on the authors; the anatomist does not reveal a constructive truth, but instead uncovers the presence of evil, the occult and all-consuming force that is the first precept of the Borelian and the early Flaubertian universe. Vésalius's work serves to reveal and mock his wife's infidelity. He underlines the vulgarity of the mechanics of sexual desire by presenting his wife with the dissected corpses of her lovers: 'Reconnais-tu cet homme?' he asks as he reveals each carefully preserved body.[37] 'Where is the attraction now?' he asks. A darkly ironic cynicism underscores Vésalius's explanation of his ghastly project: 'Vous voyez que tout est profit à la science [...] la science vous a de grandes obligations.'[38] Flaubert has a similar view of the function and nature of science. In 'Smarh', Satan explains to his *protégé* the nature of Flaubertian science: 'La science. Eh bien, la science, c'est le doute, c'est le néant, c'est le mensonge, c'est la vanité.'[39] Satan expresses the view of both Borel and Flaubert, that science can be employed as a destructive, subversive force.

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[36] Flaubert, *Œuvres de jeunesse*, vol. II, p. 124.

[37] Borel, *Champavert*, p. 138. See Ch. 3, p. 131.

[38] Ibid.

[39] Flaubert, *Œuvres de jeunesse*, vol. II, p. 42.

Flaubert's own symbolic dissections of the human body turn desire to horror, familiarity to shock. In the end, his goal is to re-channel and subvert desire. He writes to Chevalier:

> Je dissèque sans cesse, et quand j'ai découvert la corruption dans quelque chose que l'on croit pur et la gangrène aux beaux endroits, je lève la tête et je ris.[40]

Borel's alter-ego, Champavert, finds the same putrefaction through his literary dissection:

> [...]après avoir erré long-temps dans la forêt, appréciant à son prix toutes choses, alambiquant, fouillant, disséquant la vie, les passions, la société, les lois, le passé et l'avenir, brisant le verre trompeur de l'optique et la lampe artificieuse qui l'éclaire, il nous prit un hoquet de dégoût devant tant de mensonges et de misères.[41]

The young Flaubert's glee in exposing the corrupt side of beauty was equally present in his at times bizarre and frenzied behaviour. There is more than a hint of the lycanthrope in the imitations and outbursts that often alarmed his family. Flaubert's eccentricities included the disturbing habit of aping 'un mendiant épileptique' much to the embarrassment of his father. Flaubert was given to imitating a number of grotesque characters, among them was the 'Garçon': 'Casser et briser tout, roter...renverser les encriers...faire enfin l'entrée du "Garçon"!'[42] In the words of one critic the 'Garçon' was 'Ubu préfiguratif, ravageur, ordurier, coprophage, impie, sacrilège, monstrueux'.[43] He was a character who represented 'l'ignoble pour l'ignoble'.[44] We should recall the importance that the *jeunes-France* placed upon action and dress in the expression of their literary identities. In the discussion of the *bousingo* identity in the first chapter of this thesis, Armand Hoog was cited as recognising that the *bousingo* or *jeune-France* had

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[40] Letter cited in preface to *Novembre*, p. 18.

[41] Borel, *Champavert*, p. 354.

[42] In a letter to Chevalier, *Correspondance*, vol. II, p. 30.

[43] Vuillemin, 'Preface' to *Novembre*, p. 24.

[44] Letter to Chevalier, 8 mars, 1839.

developed 'un romantisme existentiel', expressing their literary ideals as much through outrageous action and dress sense as through actual literary work. Flaubert, for his part, recognised the significance of habits and dress in the expression of the *jeune-France* aesthetic. In the final lines of his short story 'Un parfum à sentir', two medical students, in obviously *bousingo* attire and with bousingo habits, contemplate purchasing the corpse of the story's heroine:

> C'était un véritable élève en médecine, avec un habit vert râpé, couvert de duvet, une casquette rouge et une pipe de faïence dans laquelle il fumait le fin Maryland.[45]

The clashing colours of his costume, the red cap and clay pipe, and particularly his habit of smoking 'le fin Maryland', reveal the student's bohemian and likely Republican sympathies. We must recall that Borel's recourse, in the face of an intractable political dialogue, was to adultery, crime and 'le tabac de Missouri'. New World tobacco represented the freedom and savagery of the American frontier, as it also carried the political symbolism of republican America. These small symbols were highly significant at a time when a character like Borel was arrested for something as small as having 'la démarche républicaine'.[46]

This preoccupation with artistic and political identity that characterised so much debate in the 1830s was a symptom of a wider preoccupation with the artist's role in the world. In this context, we see Flaubert exploring again attitudes that Borel and his followers had initiated.

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[45] Ibid., p. 106.

[46] The importance of the sartorial code for the identity of the *bousingo* and *jeune-France* cannot be stressed enough. We have seen the character of the *bousingo* typified in Sand's *Horace*, in the person of Laravinière, *le roi des bousingots*. His costume was described with scrupulous attention to detail, and included a long clay pipe and polished leather cap. In one of Flaubert's allegorical anecdotes from 'Agonies, pensées sceptiques', he describes the character of a gravedigger, who certainly serves as a metaphor for the morbid curiosity of the *jeune-France*: 'C'était un bien brave homme que cet homme, indifférent pour le présent, insoucieux pour l'avenir; il avait un chapeau de cuir ciré, et une pipe à la bouche.' (Flaubert, *Œuvres de jeunesse*, vol. I, p. 407)

Irony, Evil and the Exploration of the Author's Role in the Early Flaubert

Both Borel and the young Flaubert use their apparent preoccupation with the presence of evil in the world as the premise for exacting literary revenge upon an unsuspecting public. A 'duty' to tell the truth 'forces' the authors to run the risk of alienating the reader. Simultaneously, the reader is enticed as much by morbid curiosity as by the author's apparent integrity. This rhetorical and ethical strategy is more forcefully present in the prose of Borel, but does appear in the early work of Flaubert, and it signals Flaubert's early development of a relationship to his prospective reader that grows out of the *bousingo* example.

There is a focus upon the ethical nature of the writer's relationship to his text and to his audience in a number of prefatory remarks to Flaubert's early, short works, and within the texts themselves. In the preface to 'Un parfum à sentir', Flaubert places the fault of the unmitigated horror of the story squarely on the shoulders of an unjust society. Such responsibility lies not with the author, nor with the characters, but is a symptom of the wider problem of evil in the world:

> La faute n'est certes à aucun des personnages du drame.
> La faute, c'est aux circonstances, aux préjugés, à la société, à la nature qui s'est faite mauvaise mère.
> [...]
> La faute, c'est a cette divinité sombre et mystérieuse qui, née avec l'homme, subsiste encore après son néant, qui s'aposta à la face de tous les siécles et de tous les empires, et qui rit dans sa férocité en voyant la philosophie et les hommes se tordre dans leurs sophismes pour nier son existence [...][47]

The above description is pure Borel! And if the responsibility for evil and for the horrors portrayed within the short stories lies with some extradiegetic and wicked force of nature,

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[47]Ibid., p. 70.

then the author is (purportedly) absolved of all accusations of immorality or ill-will toward his reader. Such a claim leaves the author with much freedom to portray his own intentions. In the early paragraphs of 'Mémoires d'un fou', Flaubert employs a tone of frank avowal and slyly ironic retraction when presenting his work, an effect very similar to that of the rhetoric we encountered in the preface of Borel's *Rhapsodies*. Flaubert presents the work as a spontaneous, and thus un-selfconsciously truthful document, while at the same time avoiding responsibility for the work's quality (and to some degree for the its content, too):

> Seulement je vais mettre sur le papier tout ce qui me viendra à la tête, mes idées avec mes souvenirs, mes impressions, mes rêves, mes caprices, tout ce qui passe dans la pensée et dans l'âme; du rire et des pleurs, du blanc et du noir, des sanglots partis d'abord du cœur et étalés comme de la pâte dans des périodes sonores, et des larmes délayées dans des métaphores romantiques. Il me pèse cependant à penser que je vais écraser le bec à un paquet de plumes, que je vais user une bouteille d'encre, que je vais ennuyer le lecteur et m'ennuyer moi-même; j'ai tellement pris l'habitude du rire et du scepticisme, qu'on y trouvera, depuis le commencement jusqu'à la fin, une plaisanterie perpétuelle, et les gens qui aiment à rire pourront à la fin rire de l'auteur et d'eux-mêmes.[48]

Flaubert employs a gentler rhetoric than did Borel, but the strategy has much the same source and goal. He acknowledges that he dips into the fount of romantic metaphor, but at the same time, he is wary of wasting ink and paper to repeat romantic cliché. His reluctance stems not simply from a fear of cliché, but from a more substantial ethical dilemma: shall he tire his reader and compromise himself with a literary exercise that is, in the end, a joke? Borel, too, considered this problem, albeit with less hesitation. He mocked his reader, and dared him to engage with a work that was 'slag and spittle'. He threatened that those who would scorn the work were mistaken in their understanding; their contempt was turned back upon them. For both authors, the answer to the problem of an author's relation to and presentation of his work was an evasive irony.

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[48] Ibid., p. 484.

The title of Flaubert's 'Mémoires d'un fou' expresses this irony. There is a natural hesitation on the part of the reader before engagement with the work and interpretation can begin. The problem springs directly from the authorial dilemma outlined above. We have observed Flaubert and Borel addressing the problem of how the author is to situate himself regarding a text that he is hesitant to characterise. If the author's presentation shifts between modes of avowal and denial, what position is the reader to take? In the case of 'Mémoires d'un fou', the ironic tension of this problem is built into the title. How is the reader to interpret the 'mémoires' if the author is mad? To what extent is the narrative a clear account of the author/subject's madness? To what extent does that same madness distort the narrative account of a previous state of madness? Flaubert comments on the paradox in the short preface to the work:

> [Ces pages] renferment une âme toute entière. Est-ce la mienne? est-ce celle d'un autre? J'avais d'abord voulu faire un roman intime, où le scepticisme serait poussé jusqu'aux dernières bornes du désespoir; mais peu à peu, en écrivant, l'impression personnelle perça à travers la fable, l'âme remua la plume et l'écrasa. J'aime donc mieux laisser cela dans le mystère des conjectures; pour toi, tu n'en feras pas.
>
> Seulement tu croiras peut-être, en bien des endroits, que l'expression est forcée et le tableau assombri à plaisir; rappelle-toi que c'est un fou qui a écrit ces pages, et, si le mot paraît souvent surpasser le sentiment qu'il exprime, c'est que, ailleurs, il a fléchi sous le poids du cœur.[49]

The author's claim of candour entices the reader to ignore the risks that a text presented in this manner might hold. The morbid voyeurism of the reader is further titillated by the author's promise to reveal the secrets of madness. As in the work of Borel, the narrator's relationship to the text is deliberately difficult to qualify.

Shoshana Felman appraises madness as the mark of the 'unique genre'—the memoir or confession.[50] According to Felman, the singularity of madness defined its modernity as well as its linguistic irony: '[...] the arbitrariness of the sign does not allow

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[49] Ibid., p. 482.

[50] Felman, Shoshana, '*Mémoires d'un fou*; *Novembre*- Modernity of the Commonplace', in *Critical Essays on Gustave Flaubert*, Lawrence M. Porter, ed. (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1986).

itself to be preceded by an esthetic of meaning'; in other words, madness, even language itself, cannot supersede itself to tell of itself.[51] The intertextual significance becomes clear when this position is taken in a literary historical context. Felman stresses the continuity of madness as a phenomenon of language from its sources in English Romantics such as Byron, and in Shakespeare, through the French Romantics. But when the critic considers factors outside the strictly textual context, it grows clear that there is a serious break at some point in the 1830s. Sainte-Beuve's *Joseph Delorme* represents one of the last serious efforts within the strictly romantic vein; his work is a relatively clear, uncomplicated ethical paradigm of the relationship of author to text (or, in this context, of troubled artist to the expressions of his madness). On the other side of this frontier are Lassailly, Borel, and the young Flaubert.

Although it is clear that the young Flaubert's assessment of and relationship to his texts is far removed from the grandiloquence and relatively unself-conscious romantic introspection of two generations previous, Flaubert employs less of the focused deception that Borel uses so frequently in his polemical rhetoric, in his narrative asides, epilogues and prefaces. Flaubert's addresses to his prospective reader are often the embarrassed and self-critical expostulations of an adolescent. Unsure of himself (and perhaps accustomed to belittling of his intellectual qualities) Flaubert often begs the reader's patience, or makes excuses for work that he fears is lacking in quality. In the preface to 'Smarh', Flaubert warns:

> Cette œuvre, inédite jusquà ce jour, n'a pas obtenu le prix Montyon.
> Le curieux, le malheureux, qui ouvrira ceci, pourra s'en étonner, car sa bêtise semble devoir le lui décerner de droit.[52]

Flaubert's characterisation of his prospective reader anticipates the emotional states that both draw the reader to the text, and through which the text will lead him. The reader is

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[51] Felman, p. 35.

[52] Flaubert, *Œuvres de jeunesse*, vol. II, p. 8

first 'curieux', and subsequently 'malheureux'. Flaubert recognises the effects of his ironic position (or his confessed lack of talent) upon his reader's moods.

Flaubert's early work does not show a relationship between author and reader that is as contentious or as developed as that found in Borel's literature. Borel was fighting what he considered the artist's fight in the journalistic and literary world of Paris; Flaubert was a young man with little experience of either; his addresses to his reader contain more than traces of adolescent insecurity. Yet it must be noted that works such as 'Novembre' and 'Mémoires d'un fou' contain elements of the fanciful and unreliable autobiography, characterised by varying layers of narrative voice, that we have seen in Borel and elsewhere. 'Novembre' in particular displays a very similar relationship between two narrative voices to that present in *Champavert*. The first narrator describes his own intellectual and sexual development. The second interjects at a late point in the text, and claims that the manuscript the reader had been following ends suddenly. It is that unstable moment at which 'language [attempts to supersede] itself to tell of itself'.[53] The second narrator recounts pieces of the author's childhood, and tells of his death, filling in many autobiographical details. (Following, one would suppose, the critical paradigm of Sainte-Beuve: knowledge of the autobiography as a previous state of the text complements and completes knowledge of the text itself.) Much like the narrator in *Champavert* who presents himself as a friend of the deceased author (and by implication a friend of the reader), the second narrator of 'Novembre' has apparently brought the manuscript to light, and passes on the details of the author's life out of a sense of duty and for the reader's education. Yet, unlike Sainte-Beuve, and very much like *Champavert*, a self-conscious artificiality informs the second narrator's presentation of his 'found' manuscript. The intention of this second narrator is far from

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[53] Felman, op. cit., p. 35.

straightforward. The second narrator recounts the restlessness and ennui of his subject, and then, in a capricious turn, kills him off through the sole power of his own thought.

The final two paragraphs of 'Novembre' underline the superficial and self-conscious fictionality of the autobiographical premise. The impossibility of such an act as superseding oneself causes the whole pretence to collapse. The reader is led to question the nature and value of what he has read, and in the ensuing confusion, Flaubert, the author, slips away (if he was ever present). The second narrator comments that the reader will tolerate the lack of verisimilitude because such a capricious and incongruous ending is something well within the conventions of fiction:

> Enfin, au mois de décembre dernier, il mourut, mais lentement, petit à petit, par la seule force de la pensée, sans qu'aucun organe fût malade, comme on meurt de tristesse, ce qui paraîtrait difficile aux gens qui ont beaucoup souffert, mais ce qu'il faut bien tolérer dans un roman, par amour du merveilleux.[54]

The process strongly resembles Champavert's death at the hands of Borel, the narrator, who, tiring of the proliferation and distortion of his literary identity, murdered his own alter-ego. There is more to this situation than the linguistic problem that Shoshana Felman describes. If we consider the relationship of author, text and reader using the model of Kierkegaard's circuit of communication, we find that a problem of identity is central to what may appear a problem of language; and Socratic irony holds the key to freeing a literary identity that finds itself trapped in a circuit of communication whose language cannot express its fulness, and whose dynamism subjects it to distortion.

There is an irony at work in this short novel that is very similar to that seen in the work of Borel. The reader comes to expect a certain congruity in plot elements and relationships (both intra- and extra-diegetic; between characters; between author and text; between author and reader, etc.); but the author tests this relationship, and demands that

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[54] Flaubert, Gustave, *Novembre*, p. 177.

the reader make certain leaps of faith simply because the fictionality of the work demands and allows it. At the same time, what was promised the reader, given the autobiographical genre, is not delivered. Intimate details that reveal the core of the first narrator's identity are not delivered and in fact his persona disappears. The reader is engaged by the promise of intimacy that the genre holds, but in the end the author manages to escape, his secret and his identity well out of reach. The flexibility that irony lends to the relationship between author and reader allows both Borel and Flaubert to engage the reader's attention while simultaneously preparing to assault that reader's moral assumptions, and to cause him to question his own capacity for judgement.

The young Flaubert's most interesting expression of his preoccupation with demoralising, with exposing 'l'ignoble pour l'ignoble', comes in the shape of narrative strategy. He did not express Borel's style of literary provocation in entirely the same 'existential' manner as the *jeunes-France* had done, nor did he develop a literary identity or persona much beyond the frenzied imitations he enjoyed in his youth. In his later work, he obscured the authorial identity and intentions that the *jeunes-France* had put on such prominent display. But Flaubert did develop narrative strategies that spring from the *jeune-France* tendency toward provocation. Here again, as with the philosophical themes running through his work, we see considerable borrowing from Borel.

Flaubert's Early Narrative Strategies

Another means by which Borel attempted to shock his reader, and to lead him to doubt his own judgement, was through certain narrative tricks, particularly the sting-in-the-tail ending seen in the majority of his short stories. A good number of the early short

stories of Flaubert conclude with the same type of sting-in-the-tail that lends to his fiction a darkly humorous, Borelian irony. In both authors' work the violence and graphic imagery, the often provocative tone and rhetoric, have a disconcerting effect that is heightened (one would say by several orders of magnitude) by the incongruous and often shocking conclusion to each story. One of the most provocatively Borelian short stories of Flaubert's youth, 'Quidquid volueris', serves as a perfect example. The story contains all of the elements that have become familiar in *Champavert*: suicide, rape, murder, and the lycanthropic savagery of the principle character, Djalioh, half-man and half-ape. The tale follows Paul, a young bourgeois gentleman, who brings with him a companion on the return from a trip to Brazil. The companion, Djalioh, is a grotesque creature who is both drawn to human culture and repulsed by it. He entertains the sentimental reveries of a vast, artistic soul, yet he cannot express himself. He is repulsed by the trappings of civilised amusement, and his bourgeois hosts take him for a deformed half-wit:

> Eh bien, que fait-il, Djalioh? aime-t-il les cigares? dit le fumeur, en en présentant plein ses deux mains et en laissant tomber avec intention sur les genoux d'une dame.
>
> Du tout mon cher, il les a en horreur.
>
> Chasse-t-il?
>
> Encore moins, les coups de fusil lui font peur.
>
> Sûrement il travaille, il lit, il écrit tout le jour?
>
> Il faudrait pour ça qu'il sache lire et écrire.
>
> Aime-t-il les chevaux, demanda le convalescent.
>
> Du tout.
>
> C'est donc un animal inerte et sans intelligence. Aime-t-il le sexe?
>
> Un jour je l'ai mené chez les filles, et il s'est enfui emportant une rose et un miroir.
>
> Décidément c'est un idiot, fit tout le monde.

Each character seeks in Djalioh a recognition of what he himself enjoys. The convalescent looks for a love of movement in horse riding. The smoker asks if he is fond of cigars. When they do not find the reassurance that Djalioh shares their pleasures, they quickly dismiss him as a cretin. There is something to be said here about Flaubert's apparent awareness of the importance of familiarity and recognition for a bourgeois

audience. Borel played with these concepts when, in *Champavert* and *Madame Putiphar*, he ironically presented his work laden with the tropes of melodrama, a familiar and moralising genre, only to subvert his own presentation. Flaubert, as we shall see, employs the same tricks.

Flaubert takes pains to portay the rich inner life of Djalioh, in contradistinction to the shallow judgement of his hosts. He has human desires and an artistic sensitivity that are accentuated by his animal senses. Djalioh's apparent lack of intelligence has little bearing on his range of sentiment, or his desire for self-expression. Unfortunately, his clumsy, ape-like body can give no expression to what he feels. During a ball, Djalioh is inspired by the dancers and music. He takes a spare violin and attempts to play:

> [...] Il approcha le violon de son menton, tout le monde se mit à rire, tant la musique était fausse, bizarre, incohérente [...][55]

In contrast to the popular disdain for Djalioh's music, Flaubert describes its strange and savage beauty:

> [...] des arpèges hardis, des octaves qui montaient, des notes qui couraient en masse puis s'envolaient comme une flèche gothique [...] des pensées vagues et coureuses qui se succédaient comme une ronde de démons [...][56]

None among the audience are able to decipher its beauty. There is an image here that is quite similar to the situations of public censure and ridicule that the *jeune-France* endured for their loyalty to a style of art that was considered savage and immoral, like the chaotic music of the man-ape, or the morbid rantings of the lycanthrope. The reaction to public censure is the same in the case of Borel, and in the case of Flaubert's character. Unable to express himself, Djalioh is rocked with inner turmoil:

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[55] Flaubert, *Œuvres de jeunesse*, vol. I, p. 224.

[56] Ibid.

> C'était un supplice infernal, une douleur de damné. Quoi! sentir dans sa poitrine toutes les forces qu'il faut pour aimer et avoir l'âme navrée d'un feu brûlant, et puis ne pouvoir éteindre le volcan qui vous consume, ni briser le lien qui vous attache!

The problem encapsulates that of Borel's lycanthropic persona. He cannot hope to express the passion and savagery of his artistic conviction to an audience that appreciates only familiarity and moralising reassurance. Yet he cannot break free of the frenzied persona that he has created.

The outcome of such a paradox is equally gruesome in the case of both Flaubert's Djalioh, and Borel's lycanthrope. Champavert goes on a killing spree, wiping out every trace of himself, his love and his progeny. In the same manner, the passion of Djalioh ends in a ghastly murder/suicide. The graphic description of the rape and murder of Paul's wife at the hands of Djalioh rivals any of the horrors that Borel created. In a frenzy of animalistic desire, Djalioh strips Adèle, Paul's wife, and attacks her savagely:

> Il [...] lui enfonça ses griffes dans la chair et l'attira vers lui, il lui ôta sa chemise [...]
> Enfin sa féroce brutalité ne connut plus de bornes, il sauta sur elle d'un bond, écarta ses deux mains, l'étendit par terre, et l'y roula échevelée. Souvent il poussait des cris féroces et étendait les deux bras stupide et immobile, puis il râlait de volupté comme un homme qui se...[57]

The text stops ominously. Adèle dies during the sex act, and Djalioh, incensed and confused, kisses her limp body and then runs madly about the room, bouncing from the walls. Finally, he lunges headlong at the the marble fireplace, cracking his skull. He instantly falls dead, immobile and bleeding profusely, upon the corpse of Adèle.

There is an interesting parallel between this scene and the rape and murder of Dina, from Borel's 'Dina, la belle juive', concerning the author's careful construction of a sense of complicity with the perpetrator of the crime in each case. Both acts of

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[57] Ibid., p. 233.

violence are the expression of a criminality for which each author shows more than a hint of sympathy. And in each case, the act is sudden, and the complicity is unexpected. The reader is drawn to share a perspective with the criminal, something that Béatrice Didier noted as a distinctly Sadean element in portions of *Madame Putiphar*. Djalioh's cruelty is the expression of his burning but stifled artistic passion, and the crime of Jean Pontu, the *batelier*, in 'Dina' is an acting-out of his revolt against sexual and political oppression; his views of oppression are paradoxically and chillingly rational in the face of his rape and murder of the tale's heroine. Each crime is horrible, yet the moral boundaries that would define it are blurred by the narrative perspective. The crime becomes more 'sympathetic' because the reader understands it to be the desperate expression of a personality suffocated by the political or artistic mainstream. Yet, given this understanding or familiarity, the crimes are more shocking. Were they to be the mechanical villainy of a stock character, the reader could feel a comforting outrage, while simultaneously distancing himself from the offending act. The element of complicity and its paradox define the literary strategy of the 'lycanthrope' as Borel expressed it: shocking savagery is the ever-present yet frequently hidden face of political or artistic idealism.

The conclusion of 'Quidquid volueris' displays another characteristic mark of the Borelian 'conte immoral', the sting-in-the-tail ending. In fact, a number of Flaubert's short stories and novellas concluded in this manner: the narrative perspective and tone shift abruptly; the precipitous pace of the dénouement is brought almost to a halt; a darkly comical and incongruous twist causes the moral context to change suddenly, and the reader is forced to re-evaluate what he has read. The end of 'Quidquid volueris' finds a family of 'épiciers' discussing Djalioh's crime over dinner. In the shallow comfort of the shopkeeper's kitchen, the family is reunited 'patriarcalement' around 'un énorme

gigot dont le fumet chatouillait l'odorat'.[58] In turn each family member mechanically pronounces his indignation in a fashion appropriate to his station, revealing little true sympathy for the victim, and no understanding of the crime or criminal. The reaction is similar to the judgements passed on Djalioh by Paul's bourgeois guests, who sought familiarity in the person of the ape-man and, finding none, dismissed him as an idiot. Complacency ironically characterises the judgement of the father, eminently 'moral' in his qualifications and cliched comments:

> Comment! disait l'épicier, indigné dans sa vertu, homme éminemment moral, décoré de la croix d'honneur pour bonne tenue dans la garde nationale, et abonné au *Constitutionnel*, comment, aller tuer ct'en paure ptite femme! c'est indigne![59]

A small, jowly child remarks that, perhaps, the crime was the result of passion. His suggestion is interrupted by the apprentice *épicier*:

> Oh! faut-il que des gens aient peu de retenue, dit le garçon épicier, en redemandant pour la troisième fois des haricots.[60]

His indignation at the apparently widespread lack of self-discipline that led to such a crime does not run deep enough to affect his copious appetite. He rises from the table, and in the final action of the story, goes to sell candles at the scandalous price of 'deux sous'!

The final paragraph of the story comprises an apparently improvised moral that would have been difficult, if not impossible, for the reader to anticipate. Flaubert clearly considered the reader's desire for a substantial and reassuring conclusion; he anticipates the reader's disillusion in front of the shocking complacency of the *épicier* family, and with mock exasperation, pretends to give the the reader what the reader wants:

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[58] Ibid., p. 239.

[59] Ibid.

[60] Ibid.

> Vous voulez une fin à toute force, n'est-ce pas? et vous trouvez que je suis bien long à la donner, et bien, soit![61]

Apparently, the story has a happy and reassuring moral for all. Despite the fact that Adèle's corpse has rotted so horribly after two years that, during her exhumation and removal to Père Lachaise, a gravedigger becomes physically ill, Djalioh has been turned into a fabulous display skeleton, cleaned and polished and exhibited in a cabinet of zoological curiosities; as for Paul, he has re-married and seems to have forgotten the whole affair. All's well that ends well!

'Quidquid volueris' is one among many stories with the sort of provocative, ironic twist that would become a trademark of Flaubert's short stories and even of his novels. From *Trois contes*, through the second version of *L'Education sentimentale*, Flaubert employs a number of narrative tricks and moral conundrums for which he developed a taste during his immersion as a youth in the 'unhealthy' and 'bad' literature of the *jeunes-France*. There is a Borelian irony in the incongruity of the giant, divine parrot looming over the bed of a dying Félicité, or of Frédéric's pronouncement, coming at the end of a sizeable novel that appears a critique of the preoccupations of the generation of 1848, that nothing was as important to him as the recollection of a nervous and aborted adolescent visit to a brothel! Obviously, within the thematics of 'Un cœur simple' and according to Félicité's conception of the universe, the sudden appearance of the divine parrot makes perfect sense; and Flaubert's plan for *L'Education sentimental* was admittedly to write a novel about nothing. But for the reader who does not share in Flaubert's enthusiasm for dissection and discouragement (or in the same manner, for the reader who did not share in Borel's or the *jeune-France*'s fierce attachment to artistic liberty and love of provocation) a trap has been laid.

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[61] Ibid., p. 240.

The final moments of 'Un parfum à sentir' reveal a similar narrative strategy. The story follows the miserable life of a group of Parisian acrobats, who live on the edge of starvation. One of the main characters, Marguerite, suffers not only the privations of her errant and comfortless lifestyle, she is also repulsively ugly. When her husband falls in love with a beautiful dancer who joins their troupe, Marguerite suffers a long series of torments brought on by hunger and jealousy. Her situation worsens progressively; she is abused by her husband and taunted by her rival. She watches her children dying of malnutrition, and in the final moments of the story, she commits suicide. Her role in the tale is similar to that of Apolline from Borel's story 'Monsieur de l'Argentière' in *Champavert*. She is a pathetic character who attracts and builds the reader's sympathy. A concern for her fate, and a curiosity on the part of the reader to discover what outcome such an accumulation of tragedy could have for the character, are foremost in engaging the reader in the work. Yet it is the reader's desire to see justice done, and his expectation of a moralising conclusion that make it easier to deceive him. The incongruity of the conclusion of a tale like 'Monsieur de l'Argentière' or 'Jaquez Barraou' magnifies the injustice portrayed within the story, while avoiding resolving the moral issues raised by that injustice.

A similar process is at work in the penultimate scene of 'Un parfum à sentir'. Marguerite clings to the carriage wheel of a nobleman who has taken into his company Isabellada, Marguerite's arch-rival and the object of her insane jealousy. Marguerite screams that she will take revenge on Isabellada for alienating her husband from her. The nobleman asks Isabellada who Margeurite is. 'Je ne sais, une folle sans doute,' is her only reply. As in a story by Borel, at the moment when it appeared that Marguerite's degradation could not be any worse, the nobleman has his lackey whip Marguerite repeatedly in the face. A crowd witnesses her tantrum and her beating, and chases her,

chanting, 'La folle! la folle!'[62] The action at this point in the story is precipitous and violent. Marguerite slaps herself on the forehead and laughs maniacally in a moment of apparent revelation. 'La mort!' she says, cackling, and runs frantically in the direction of the Seine.

In the following paragraph, the precipitous action stops and the tone changes abruptly and strikingly. Suddenly, the pronouns are impersonal, and the verbs in the passive mode. The ensuing description is as lifeless as it is explicitly grotesque. Margeurite's body lies rotting on a slab in the morgue, just as Jacquez's body, in Borel's 'Jaquez Barraou', decomposed before the reader's eyes in the tropical heat and was consumed by flies:

> On venait de retirer un cadavre de l'eau et il était exposé à la morgue; c'était une femme, un bonnet de dentelles avec des fleurs sales lui couvrait la tête, ses habits étaient déchirés et laissaient voir des membres amaigris; quelques mouches venaient bourdonner à l'entour et lecher le sang figé sur sa bouche entr'ouverte, ses bras gonflés étaient bleuâtres et couverts de petites taches noires.
>
> [...]
>
> Ce corps couvert de balafres, de marques de griffes, gonflé, verdâtre, déposé ainsi sur la dalle humide, était hideux et faisait mal à voir. L'odeur nauséabonde qui s'exhalait de ce cadavre en lambeaux, et qui faisait éloigner tous les passants oisifs, attira deux élèves en médicine.[63]

Flaubert's fascination with the physical spectacle of death was quite possibly nurtured by his habit of peeking over the garden trellis to see corpses in the Hôtel Dieu lecture-hall that bordered the Flaubert property in Rouen. But evidence that his fascination drew no less strength from the *bousingo* example also comes at the story's conclusion, where we see the two medical students, swearing and smoking Maryland tobacco in the *bousingo* style, while wearing the red cap of republican sympathizers.

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[62] Ibid., p. 105.

[63] Ibid., p. 106.

The perspective that comes at the end of 'Un parfum à sentir' is the same as that which shapes the conclusion of 'Jaquez Barraou', when a character whose passions had been painted in stark relief, and whose violent death comprised the emotional climax of the story, ceases to be a character. Borel's view of the vertiginous 'néant' that lies beyond death is equally evident in Flaubert. The horror of the story is compounded by the humiliation to which the body is subjected after death. An identical plot twist underscores the horror in 'Dina, la belle juive', or even the story chronicling the death of Champavert himself: the bones of his child's body are crushed beneath the wheels of a passing carriage.

Marguerite's carcass becomes an object of commerce. The two medical students examine the grotesque, decomposing corpse and consider buying it. 'Que voudrais-tu en faire?' demands one, questioning the value of such a corpse, even for medical experiments. Marguerite's character's significance diminishes further. Suddenly, the carriage that carried Isabellada and her lover, and that had nearly crushed Marguerite the day before, rushes by, causing the medical students to leap for cover. One of the students drops and breaks his clay pipe. The final line of the narrative has him cursing his bad luck: 'Sacré nom de Dieu! dit-il en frappant du pied, voilà la troisième que je casse de la journée!'[64] The pipe carries more importance than the body at this point, and the students' attentions are diverted. The narrative ends here, and one would imagine that they give little more consideration to the body. The conclusion to 'Jaquez Barraou' comprises the same de-dramatisation of the narrative, and devaluation of the character's body in death. As we have seen, Jaquez and his rival's corpses lie rotting in the tropical heat. They died in the height of passion and anger, but the narrative focus suddenly diverts the drama of their combat. Following the climax of their death, the physical details of their decomposition are painted in the most impersonal terms. The white man's

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[64] Ibid.

pronouncement, upon stumbling over the bodies, compromises the value of their struggle in a way that the reader could hardly have anticipated.

Flaubert's short story 'Rage et impuissance' contains a similarly moral twist, though the narrative style changes little with the dénouement. Instead, as in a number of stories with morally incongruous or shocking conclusions, Flaubert addresses the reader directly, with a cynical, mock-moral epilogue. The sub-title of the tale, 'conte malsain pour les nerfs sensibles et les âmes dévotes', resembles Borel's own 'contes immoraux' subtitle to *Champavert*. Provocative titles and sub-titles such as 'contes immoraux' or 'contes bruns' were common among the *jeunes-France* and presaged the 'conte cruel' popularised later in the century by Villiers de l'Isle-Adam.

'Rage et impuissance' follows a M. Ohmlin who is buried prematurely after taking an overdose of opium. Ohmlin awakes to find himself entombed. The story depicts the development of his anguish as he realises that he faces a slow death by suffocation. His loyal dog, Fox, senses his peril and barks furiously while pawing the earth of his grave. The reader is given little indication of the interval of time that passes, but finally, a gravedigger notices the dog's distress and exhumes the body. The pacing of the story would lead the reader to expect a last-minute rescue. There is no discernible narrative pause between the sequences depicting Ohmlin's desperate clawing at the inside of his coffin, the dog's alarm, and the gravedigger's apparent rescue effort. The gravedigger later recounts, with some alarm, what he discovered in the coffin:

> Le cadavre était tourné sur le ventre, son linceul était déchiré, sa tête et son bras était sous sa poitrine: 'Quand je l'ai retourné avec ma pelle, je vis qu'il avait des cheveux dans la main gauche, il s'était dévoré l'avant bras; sa figure faisait une grimace qui me fit peur, il y avait de quoi; ses yeux, tout grands ouverts, sortaient à fleur de tête; les nerfs de son cou étaient raides et tirés, on voyait ses dents blanches comme l'ivoire, car ses lèvres ouvertes, relevées par les coins, découvraient ses gencives comme s'il eût ri en mourant.'[65]

[65] Ibid., pp. 159-60.

The terrifying description of the corpse's expression is pure *jeune-France*. The loyal dog, Fox, runs off in despair and is shot by hunters who, lacking game, make sport of firing on the dog. Berthe, Ohmlin's nanny, kills herself in despair. Much as in the previous tales, a peripheral narrative coming at the conclusion devalues the sacrifice or suffering of a character. The anecdote of Fox's shooting underscores the shocking absurdity of the plot.

The tale is followed by one of the young Flaubert's cynical and hesitant moral epilogues. The omnipresence of evil and of injustice is foremost in his own analysis of the moral import of the tale; he challenges the reader to hold on to his illusions of a patient and well-meaning God in the face of such horror as he has presented. Flaubert's approach is nearly identical to the strategy that Borel explained would be the guiding principle of his creation of *Champavert* in that work's preface: to take away the public's illusions.

> Eh bien, aimable et courageux lecteur, et vous, bénévolente et peu dormeuse lectrice, que pensez-vous qu'eût répondu notre homme du cercueil, si quelque maladroit lui eût demandé son avis sur la bonté de Dieu? Eût-il répondu : peut-être? existe-t-elle? que sais-je?
> Pour moi, je pense qu'il eût dit : j'en doute ou je la nie.

And what practical advice does Flaubert give to accompany his adolescent cynicism? The final paragraph of the short story epitomises the Borelian rebelliousness and black humour that tinged so much of his early work:

> [...] et voilà toute la moralité de cette sotte œuvre, j'engage donc, ayant trouvé la conduite du sus-écrit docteur [Ohmlin] louable et bonne, j'engage tous les marmots à jeter la galette à la tête du patissier lorsqu'elle n'est point sucrée, les suceurs du piot leur vin quand il est mauvais, les mourants leurs âmes quand ils crèvent, et les hommes leur existence à la face de Dieu lorsqu'elle est amère.[66]

[66] Ibid., p. 161.

Flaubert's defense of revolt and suicide displays a similar bitter humour to that which characterised Trialph's suicide, or Passereau l'écolier's request to the local executioner: 'Je désirerais ardemment que vous me guillotinassiez!' These literary suicides are marked by a striking incongruity between, on the one hand, the insouciance or polite cynicism of the self-destructive subject, and on the other hand, by the horror of the act itself.

* * *

The young Flaubert, then, adopted many of the attitudes and styles of Borel, including the provocative rhetoric, the disillusioning narrative strategies and the disturbing and savage behaviour that were, for Borel, an affront to the middle-class reader and an affirmation of the *jeune-France* literary identity. Flaubert's 'vieilles phrénésies de jeunesse' comprised nearly all of the elements that we have witnessed in the 'romantisme existentiel' of the minor romantics. Yet the example of Pétrus Borel was there as a warning for all young authors. Borel reached a quick impasse because the problems of identity that he so frantically explored appeared unsolveable. The paradox of his heated political and literary rhetoric was that it alienated an audience he soon found he depended upon. And the paradox of the affirmation of his artistic identity lay in the fact that the more he shared with the reader, the more he risked; yet the more he concealed through irony, the more disenchanted that reader became.

Flaubert, a much subtler mind, ran through all of this drama in his late teens and early twenties. It is quite likely that the 'tragedy' of Borel served to deter him from repeating the lycanthrope's errors. The sort of cynicism and revolt that Flaubert displayed in his youth were difficult to sustain. Borel had proved this. And the

paradoxes that such revolt engendered were inimical to a prolonged literary career. The problem stemmed from the strong tie that Borel had formed between his art and his identity. His persona, the lycanthrope, was as much an object of fascination and popular speculation as his writing. On the other hand, Flaubert, the author, quickly 'disappeared' into the sort of irony that we have seen discouraging his reader in his early work. The tools of this irony, the themes and narrative strategies that shock the reader and cause him to question his capacity for judgment, become coincident with the tropes of Flaubert's 'realism': free indirect style, detailed and often morbid description. Flaubert did manage to maintain his skepticism and his artistic revolt, while keeping his artistic identity safe from the clutches of a middle-class readership that longed for definition and familiarity. And in so doing, he employed some of the lessons that he had learned in his early career from Pétrus Borel.

Borel au service de la Révolution: Borel and the Surrealists

The Surrealists were among the only authors who spent as much time considering the work of Borel as did the young Flaubert. But their project, and the lessons that they learned from Borel's example, were very different. There are two predominant views of Borel among the Surrealists. The first concerns Borel's function as a leader among those minor romantics who attached a style of behaviour to their literature. Borel was important for Tzara and Eluard, and perhaps to a lesser extent for André Breton, in that he brought poetry and literature out of the text and explored the function of identity in literary communication, at the same time employing a subversive rhetoric to challenge his reading public. He was, in the words of Eluard, an 'intelligence révolutionnaire' along with de Sade.[67] Eluard's characterisation implies a political coherence that I believe was

[67] Eluard, Paul, *Œuvres complètes*, 2 vols. (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1968), vol. II, p. 806.

non-existent in the work of Borel. In fact, Borel's revolutionary stance was confined almost entirely to the realm of art. His political affirmations were a rejection of politics, as we have seen, and his bizarre and often raucous behaviour was less an affront to political institutions than it was an exploration of the moral obligations of the artist. Borel's political avowals were demands for liberty in the realm of art, and his provocation of his reader tested and re-defined the conventional relations between author, reader and text.

More interesting than the appropriation of Borel's savage literary persona for a political, revolutionary agenda, is the place that André Breton gives Borel in the history of 'l'humour noir'. Breton's attempts to characterise the development of black humour come face to face with a number of the problems of identity, irony and their manifestations in literary, narrative technique that we have explored in this thesis. Though Breton, like his contemporaries, certainly saw literature as a possible political tool, his approach to Borel is tempered by hesitation before the difficulty of characterising black humour, and humour itself. Breton appears slightly more aware than other Surrealists that the paradoxes inherent to Borel's type of literature preclude political discourse, or political interpretation. Yet his definition of black humour incorporates an ideological bias that underwrites the Surrealist project, and that is often alien to the climate of literary and philosophical ideas in which Borel lived and worked.

As I stated at the beginning of this thesis, critics of Borel in this century have often fallen prey to the temptation to fill in the gaps of what may be characterised as an incomplete literary project. Borel's aborted career becomes, for the Surrealists, an unfinished revolutionary act, both political and aesthetic. It is useful to recall the words of Bruno Pompili. Borel represents the aesthetic failings of a generation that felt all of the tensions of the change and turmoil of the 1830s, without successfully organising the application of what they had experienced:

> Borel va a rappresentare simbolicamente il fallimento estetico e rivoluzionario di una generazione che aveva provato tutte le tensioni del cambiamento senza riuscire a organizzare l'applicazione.[68]
> (Borel continues to represent, symbolically, the aesthetic and revolutionary failure of a generation that had felt all of the tensions of change without succeeding in putting them into practice.)

The key concept in this definition is 'applicazione'. In what application or practice were the minor romantics seen as failing? In the case of the Surrealists, it appears that the criteria of twentieth-century, revolutionary politics are brought in to define the efforts of a group far removed from twentieth-century concerns. The minor romantics indisputably expressed the tensions of their age. And Borel, though his career did not last much more than a decade, ran through a remarkable range of provocative albeit anomalous ideas that had far reaching influences. If Pompili defines 'applicazione' as the concerted effort to affect public opinion or political discourse through literature, then Borel certainly failed. But this was not apparently Borel's goal. If Pompili defines 'applicazione' as the achievement, through literature, of creating a defining moment of innovation that fully expresses an age or cultural climate, then Borel failed in that instance as well. Though he came to typify the *jeune-France* personality of the early 1830s, his talent certainly was not developed enough to capture fully the turmoil of his age.

Tristan Tzara concentrated on compensating for the first perceived failure of the *bousingo* project.[69] He saw the political possibilities that the *bousingo* habit of tying 'un comportement à la littérature' opened. The *bousingo* had brought poetry into everyday life in an affront to the middle-class. Their project, according to Tzara, *should* have led to more substantial results:

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[68]Borel, Pétrus, *Critica degli spettacoli*, ed. Bruno Pompili (Pescara: Libreria dell'Universittà, 1979), p. XII. The translation is my own.

[69] In reference to the Surrealists, I will use the term *bousingo* as they themselves employed it, though Borel and his followers rejected the term. The Surrealists appear to have been mistaken in judging the political involvement of Borel and his group, who, as I have explained in Ch. 1, claimed to resemble more closely the *jeune-France* tribe; they placed the emphasis on literature where the *bousingo* were given to riotous political activism.

> Les costumes excentriques que les Bousingos [romantiques mineurs] portaient, leur dandisme, leur comportement en société, leur illuminisme et leurs appels à la révolte, le scandale sur la voie publique, considérés non seulement comme un défi à la bourgeoisie haïe mais surtout comme un des éléments poétiques réels, autant de jalons posés sur une route qui devait mener vers des résultats plus substantiels : la tendance de transposer la poésie dans la vie quotidienne, tendance qui, inconsciemment impliquait l'idée que *la poésie pouvait exister en dehors du poème.*[70]

The results and conditions that Tzara anticipated, had the *bousingo* been more committed revolutionaries, are discussed in his essay 'Les Bousingos comme phénomène social'.[71] In this article, Tzara calls for a re-evaluation of romanticism according to the tenets of dialectical materialism. He further ties the innovations of the minor romantics to Hegelian ideas of progress. Certainly, as I have shown, the *bousingos* had read Saint-Simon, and were familiar and even fleeting participants in the social experimentation of the day. But the *bousingos*, like any young people, were given to throwing raucous parties, singing drunkenly in the streets, and engaging in any behaviour that they felt was provocative and outrageous. They developed no political manifestoes, nor were they, apart from Borel, given to political avowals of any sort. And even Borel's engagement with the rhetoric of politics appeared, as we have also seen, a clever ruse to avoid political questions altogether. The *bousingo* connection with politics came from the literary press and from their readership. They were characterised as espousing radical political ideas, they were arrested and harassed simply because any outrageous behaviour was suspected of concealing a political motive during the years of riots and insurrections following the July Revolution.

None of the Surrealists spent much time examining the conditions under which the *bousingo* identity developed. It is thus impossible to disengage the myth that developed through the press and through the provocative attitudes that Borel and his

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[70] Tzara, Tristan, 'Essai sur la situation de la poésie', in *Œuvres complètes*, 6 vols. (Paris: Flammarion, 1982), vol. V, pp. 11-12.

[71] Tzara, Tristan, 'Les Bousingos comme phénomène social' in *Œuvres complètes*, vol. V.

followers adopted to bait and discourage the public, from the intentions of the authors themselves, or from the anecdotes and legends that were propagated by later, nineteenth-century critics such as Jules Clarétie. To read backwards historically, it is quite an easy matter to ascribe pre-Marxist motives to a group that claimed only to fight for the freedom of the artist. Steinmetz continues the Surrealist line of thought in categorising Borel as one of the first to deal a blow to the elements of 'fascisme en matière littéraire.[72] Yet the critic who does this repeats the mistake of the critics and journalists contemporary with Borel, who were similarly tempted to fill in the gaps in the *bousingo* identity.

Paul Eluard has a view of the *bousingo* project that is slightly less tempered by twentieth-century political concerns. He takes a more universal view of the sort of conservatism that caused the *bousingo* participants to be harassed by the forces of order. Yet his definition is still laden with the terms of twentieth-century political insurrection, and he is tempted to read more into the *bousingo* agenda than is appropriate. Eluard gives more importance to the *bousingo* than is perhaps deserved; in his definition of 'l'intelligence révolutionnaire', he defines genius as necessarily anarchist, and claims that the 'absolute' subjects the anarchic artist to pointed criticism and a campaign of derision:

> L'esprit a ses bastilles dans lesquelles est relégué tout ce qui s'élève trop violemment contre l'ordre admis. Pour que d'immondes littérateurs puissent, ou former une élite bourgeoise, ou corrompre en paix la masse exténuée des travailleurs, le pouvoir construit de solides murailles autour des idées extrêmes. Tous les moyens lui sont bons: il a créé un critérium des valeurs littéraires, il dénonce sans replique le scandale, l'absolu est matière pour lui à de fines critiques ou à de vastes rigolades, la révolte prouve qu'un chacun est libre, même de se révolter, et le génie est anarchiste.[73]

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[72] Steinmetz, Jean-Luc, 'Les Malheurs du récit', p. 402.

[73] Eluard, Paul, *Œuvres complètes*, vol. II, p. 806.

Applying a word like anarchist to an artist like Borel is misplaced. Though Borel used the term 'anarchie' on one occasion for its shock value, and although he denounced politics and claimed that his republicanism was attached to his love of absolute liberty, his tendencies were far from anarchist. One has only to examine closely the crowd scenes at the end of *Madame Putiphar*, where the 'anarchy' of the revolutionaries is likened to a beast devouring its own entrails. In Borel's work, anarchy leads inevitably to self-destruction, as the fate of Champavert demonstrates.

The reader should also be wary of the anachronistic universality of Eluard's opposing forces of anarchy and conservatism. He gives little consideration to the complexities of a political order that, in the 1830s, was far removed from his own epoch. The artists and philosophers of Borel's time were sensitive to the rapidly shifting political spectrum, and were attracted by utopian socialism (and, paradoxically, by reactionary theology) yet, by definition, had not, of course, found Marxism, or dialectical materialism as tools of historical analysis. Even among the most 'anarchic' young artists, there was a deep suspicion of revolution, born of the memories of 1789, and of the disillusion of 1830. The demarcation between conservative and liberal political forces was never so clearly defined, nor was it perhaps as urgent in 1830 as it was when Eluard published his articles on art and revolution in 1926. The philosophical substratum of *Madame Putiphar* is the only thing remotely resembling a Marxist view of history to be found in the work of Borel's group. Even so, the differences are glaring, and the sources of the rather cloudy theories of historical evolution that inform the novel lie in the works of two 'conservative' theologians: Ballanche and de Maistre.

There is certainly something to be said for Eluard's view that, in times of crisis, 'le pouvoir construit de solides murailles autour des idées extrêmes'; even so, the statement needs some qualification. As I stated in the first chapter of this thesis, literary censorship *was* tightened in the years following 1830, in part due to the important role

that the newspaper press played in the Revolution itself. Popular suspicion ran high. But the reading public, in particular, was not so quick to construct walls around new ideas as it was to define them hastily in a way that would render them less hostile. These are not necessarily the same. The *jeunes-France* were not ostracised by the public, nor were they ignored. Indeed, the public was fascinated, as the great number of parodic articles treating the *jeune-France* attest. The newspaper press was as quick to parody government 'over-reaction' as artistic militancy. The articles parodying the habits of the *bousingo* and *jeune-France*, or the critical reception of Borel's work attest to this. Perhaps Eluard's universal claim concerning the omnipresent conspiracy of conservative forces is less valid than the idea that, in times of political uncertainty, the reading public has great incentive to define and categorise, or, in certain instances, to parody and thus to disarm. This tendency did not throw up walls around the ideas and declarations of Borel, but instead initiated a strained and dynamic dialogue that contested the role of the artist in society.

Further evidence of the imposition of political ideas on the loosely defined *bousingo* comes later in Eluard's short series of pieces on revolutionary intelligence. In his article on Borel, he lists the artists that he believes form a part of the *bousingo* group, and gives a brief description of their hatred for royalty and for the bourgeoisie:

> [Borel] est le maître incontesté de tous ces *bousingos*, ces *vaillants*, parmi lesquels on trouvait Gérard de Nerval, Philothée O'Neddy, Théophile Gautier, Devéria, Célestin Nantueil, Lassailly et cent cinquante autres qui avaient voué à la Royauté et aux bourgeois une haine farouche.[74]

The confusion of personalities, artistic groups and ideas in this citation is glaring. Lassailly never considered himself a *bousingo*, or associated himself with Borel's group, as we have seen in the preface to *Les Roueries de Trialph.* And he was not given to any

[74] Ibid., p. 808.

explicit political declarations, either for or against the monarchy or the middle-class. The connection between figures like Lassailly and Borel was an invention of the critical press of the 1830s, who compared *Les Roueries* with *Champavert*. Philothée O'Neddy, Gautier, Nerval, Devéria and Nantueil certainly cannot be classed with Borel in terms of savage hatred for the royalty or for the bourgeois. In fact, the visual artists, Devéria and Nantueil, were more closely associated with the bohemians of the *passage du Doyenné* of the later 1830s, as was Gautier after 1835, when his fame began swiftly to increase. Before this date, according to his contemporaries and to Gautier himself, he worked in the shadow of Borel, though his ideas on the role of the artist and on political concerns were very different. The *Doyenné* artists were the true precursors of 'Art for Art's sake', and did not engage in the outrageous behaviour of Borel's earlier band of provocateurs. It appears that the myth of Borel's savagery and rebelliousness has infected the reputations of all of the artists who were associated with him, no matter how loosely.

Among the Surrealists, André Breton presents the most carefully thought-out analysis of Borel's contribution to the nineteenth century, and in this instance, the emphasis lies on the ironic component of Borel's literature. Borel's Socratic irony, the elusiveness of his authorial persona, and the tension inherent in his 'humour noir' are much more important to Breton's analysis than are any political characteristics of the author. In fact, as I have already suggested, from the very opening paragraphs in his preface to *L'Anthologie de l'humour noir*, Breton admits that black humour is ill-adapted to definition and subsequently is hardly suitable for didactic purposes. This would certainly preclude the use of literature like Borel's, replete as it is with 'l'humour noir', for political purposes. It is hardly suitable for teaching the public, and thus unsuitable to incite direct political change:

> [...] il ne peut être question d'expliciter l'humour et de le faire servir à des fins didactiques. Autant vouloir dégager du suicide une morale de la vie.[75]

The mention of suicide is highly significant; in a single sentence, Breton captures much of the irony of Borel's literary project. Borel obscured the moral facet of acts that, by their very nature, anticipated a moralising context. The suicide of his alter-ego, Champavert, is a prime example.

Breton does less to define 'l'humour noir' than he does to elaborate its conditions and effects. It is probably this primordial surrender on the part of Breton, his avoidance either of categorising black humour, or of measuring it precisely, that keeps him from attaching the work of Borel to a political agenda. Breton is much more sensitive than either Eluard or Tzara to the treacherous conditions that surround it, and of its effects on the reader. He recognises the difficulty that this reader faces when engaging with the work of Borel:

> [...] son admirable *Madame Putiphar* [...] abonde en situations qui incitent à la fois au rire et aux larmes, en traits dans lesquels la sincérité la plus douloureuse s'allie à un sens aigu de la provocation, à un besoin irrésistible de défi.[76]

Madame Putiphar is the only work by Borel in which one could perhaps recognise a sustained and painful sincerity, as Breton observes. In the case of *Champavert* and to a lesser extent, *Rhapsodies*, Breton's characterisation is not so appropriate. When Breton writes again of the difficulties of the reader in engaging with Borel's work, one thinks immediately of the sheer unreadability of sections of *Madame Putiphar*. Borel's short stories, on the contrary, are concise and compelling (though perhaps 'difficult' in another sense). But certainly Borel's style, regardless of the work, comprises a paradox that Breton recognises as one of the crucial components of his 'humour noir':

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[75] Breton, André, *Anthologie de l'humour noir*, p. 13.

[76] Ibid., p. 138.

> Le style de l'écrivain, auquel s'applique comme à aucun autre l'épithète 'frénétique' et son orthographe attentivement baroque semblent bien tendre à provoquer chez le lecteur une résistance relative à l'égard de l'émotion même qu'on veut lui faire éprouver, résistance basée sur l'extrême singularisation de la forme et faute de laquelle le message par trop alarmant de l'auteur cesserait humainement d'être reçu.[77]

The other side of this paradox is the compulsion that engages the reader despite his hesitation before a work of such bizarre appearances. Breton's black humour comprises the irony that would cement otherwise incongruous narrative elements. Or, more appropriately, black humour is an electrical charge that connects two distant poles. (The title of his preface is 'Paratonerre'.) In the opening lines of his *Anthologie*, Breton borrows a few lines from Rimbaud and Baudelaire, and therein we find key terms to the definition of black humour: 'émanations, explosions,' are the elements without which black humour would be impossible. Breton has chosen an excerpt from Rimbaud's poem 'Rêve' to demonstrate the function of these terms, and in so doing provides an explanation and a model of the sort of ironic, humoristic spark that would make sense of an otherwise unapproachable text.

> On a faim dans la chambrée,
> C'est vrai.....
> Emanations, explosions,
> Un génie : Je suis le gruère!
> .....

Breton has chosen 'Rêve' not only because of its use of the terms 'émanation' and 'explosion', but because of its difficulty. It demonstrates the unreadability that is burned away when the sudden spark of recognition lights an intertext that points to the poem's own dark and difficult humour. One is reminded of Borel's dilemma at the end of *Rhapsodies*: 'Aux accords de mon luth que répondre?... j'ai faim!...' Is it the poet's genius that assuages that hunger, yet is self-consuming? The connection between the verses by Rimbaud (whose career has resemblances with Borel's) and the definition by

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[77] Ibid.

Baudelaire that Breton provides of humour as an 'explosion' lies in its electrical qualities:

> Une telle coïncidence verbale n'en est pas moins déjà significative. Elle révèle, chez les deux poètes, une même préoccupation des conditions pour ainsi dire atmosphériques dans lesquelles peut s'opérer entre les hommes le mystérieux échange du plaisir humoristique.[78]

The Surrealists were fascinated by electricity, and adopted its images and metaphors quite widely in their literature. A distance between two poles is foremost in the equation of humour; and the wider the gap, the more spectacular the spark. Similarly, Borel's relationship to his reader always demanded a rather generous and sustained suspension of disbelief on the reader's part. The gap between reader and author was necessarily wide. Borel's provocations demanded it.

Breton's definition is highly interesting, but it perhaps does not contend with one of the most interesting problems in Borel's fiction. Mireille Rosello, in her study *L'Humour noir selon André Breton*, rather generously reads into the ideas of Breton what he himself does not always characterise clearly: the importance of the reader in completing the equation of black humour. To engage the reader, black humour must,

> [...] atteindre sa liberté sans son altérité: l'humour noir s'adresse à un spectateur qui se doit d'être présent docile et soumis, qui doit se rallier à la demande du texte, qui doit faire preuve de fidélité et abdiquer ses propres possibilités d'interprétation.[79]

It is precisely this unguardedness that leaves that reader open to the shock, and the subsequent moral self-searching that black humour entails.

Breton's anthology itself can be read as a model of the demand for trust on the part of the reader. The fragments that Breton presents are not given with a clear context.

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[78] Ibid., p. 12.

[79] Rosello, Mireille, *L'Humour noir selon André Breton* (Paris: José Corti, 1987), p. 17.

Breton is even hesitant to describe precisely the kind of humour that runs through each textual fragment; his alternative is to allude to the 'conditions atmosphériques' that facilitate the sort of spark that they share. Breton points to the importance and vitality of the mysterious and unclassified commodity, 'l'humour noir', to be found in the texts presented:

> Il est de moins en moins certain, vu les exigences spécifiques de la sensibilité moderne, que les œuvres poétiques, artistiques, scientifiques, les systèmes philosophiques et sociaux dépourvus de *cette sorte* d'humour ne laissent pas gravement à désirer, ne soient pas condamnés plus ou moins rapidement à périr. Il s'agit ici d'une valeur non seulement ascendante entre toutes, mais encore capable de se soumettre toutes les autres jusqu'à faire que bon nombre d'entre elles cessent universellement d'être cotées. Nous touchons à un sujet brûlant [...][80]

Without doubt, there is a 'Borelian' attempt to engage the reader by emphasizing the importance of Breton's literary endeavour. The structure of the *Anthologie de l'humour noir*, in its rhetorical and ethical strategy, is very similarly to that of *Champavert*. An important commodity is promised: either an intimate portrait of a sensitive and troubled artistic mind; or in the case of Breton, the definition of a crucial, modern idea without which all thought risks being severely compromised. In *Champavert*, the reader is allowed to glimpse the fragments and anecdotes that hint at the accumulated trauma that caused Champavert to take his life. Similarly, in the preface to the *Anthologie*, Breton develops the issues surrounding a concept that is as difficult to define as it is indispensible. To discover this crucial concept, the reader finds that he must experience the history of the literary entity that he seeks to know. Yet the history itself is a succession of trauma and indignation. To know Champavert, the reader must relive the author's disillusion and his suicide through the short stories. And to know 'l'humour noir', the reader must re-experience the history of cruelty in literature from Swift and Sade's cannibalism, to Dalí's remarks on the spectral sex-appeal of those who have been

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[80] Breton, op. cit., p. 12.

flayed alive![81] Breton's remark that he touches upon a 'burning' subject is a darkly humorous pun. Borel and Breton cultivate the reader's 'burning' desire to learn of a crucial but obscure literary entity; yet the reader necessarily is scorched in the process of discovering that entity.

Borel Among the Critics

Borel found much greater sympathy among artists than he did with professional critics.[82] It is quite natural that an artist with such a contentious relationship with his prospective reader, an artist who was swift to attack his reader's preconceptions and judgements, did not enjoy popular or critical success. But artists, and particularly those of the nineteenth century who shared Borel's concerns, took more than a passing interest in his work. Unfortunately, the characterisations by critics and artists of what they value in Borel are not always clear. Baudelaire was forced to admit that, without Borel, there would be a lacuna in romanticism, yet he did not go very far in analysing what it was that Borel actually contributed. It has been the task of this thesis to situate an author whose place has been ignored or, if it has been recognised, has been to some extent misjudged or underestimated.

What individual critics from Borel's own century have said about him rarely gives a firm indication of his importance. Yet when one examines a cross-section of critical perspectives, the characteristics that later critics and artists appreciated do become clearer. Borel was appreciated by artists who shared in his predicaments; who felt themselves misunderstood or persecuted for their artistic vision; who were not

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[81] Included in the anthology are Swift's 'A Modest Proposal', excerpts from Sade's *Juliette*, and Dalí's 'Les Nouvelles couleurs du sexe-appeal spectral'.

[82] With perhaps the notable exception of Jules Janin. See Ch. 1, p. 12, note 24.

content always to please their readership, but shared in Borel's darkly ironic love of provocation. Flaubert was foremost among these. Baudelaire also admired Borel's ferocious insistence on going against the grain. Yet Borel's persona, as it was interpreted by the artists of his time, was understood as belonging inextricably to a fertile but fleeting period in the 1830s. He was not the embodiment of a universal, revolutionary tendency in literature, 'l'extrême gauche littéraire' as Tzara termed it. More appropriately, he was seen by many artists of his century as an ephemeral persona who captured the spirit of a vital few years in the 1830s, and who managed to leave an undefinable, yet forceful impression on other artists. Champfleury perhaps best captures the ephemeral quality of his brush with Borel:

> En 1845, alors que s'agitait dans les bureaux de *l'Artiste* une bande gaie et tapageuse à laquelle Arsène Houssaye ouvrait les portes de sa Revue, je me rappelle un personnage mélancolique qui, debout devant la cheminée, parlait gravement.
> [...]
> Ce fut là que j'aperçus une seconde fois Pétrus Borel dont le nom retentissait à mes oreilles comme le son d'une trompette. Pétrus Borel le lycanthrope, l'auteur de *Madame Putiphar*, le biographe des croque-morts, le beau Pétrus Borel était de ces personnages 'fatals' qui s'imposent à la jeunesse et lui apparaissent avec le nimbe d'une réputation bizarre.
> Il n'en était plus tout à fait ainsi en 1845. L'étrangeté du poète s'était quelque peu décolorée aux yeux des astronomes parisiens qui constatent les étoiles filantes du monde intellectuel.[83]

In the first chapter of this thesis, I presented a number of reminiscences and critiques, from Alexandre Dumas, Charles Asselineau, Baudelaire and others that characterised the unique nature of the early 1830s, the period when political insurrection was coupled with the Romantic rebellion in theatres. All agreed that the period was unique in its alchemical mixture of art, political rhetoric, violence, morbidity and rebelliousness. And most agreed that Pétrus Borel captured the spirit of the debates of this period. Those who were closest to the period in question, and particularly those who had lived through the

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[83] Champfleury,'Pétrus Borel' in *Les Vignettes romantiques. Histoire de la littérature et de l'art, 1825-1840* (Paris: E. Dentu, 1883), pp. 146-7.

1830s, realised, more acutely than later critics, that politics and literature shared a complex and dynamic relationship, but were rarely coincident, though their rhetoric often appeared identical. Charles Asselineau reminds us that Borel and his circle, though they adopted alternative styles of living and were conversant with the utopian socialism and illuminism of the period, directed their energy toward the betterment of art. They rallied against commerce and against the middle-class because they saw professionalism as destructive to the liberty of the artist:

> Mais il faut y prendre garde, Pétrus Borel et ses amis auraient eu horreur d'une organisation sociale basée sur le travail manuel, et que ne dominerait point le culte de la poésie et des arts. La société qu'ils voulaient démolir, c'était la boutiquière et maltotière, non pas la bourgeoisie, mais le bourgeoisisme, l'autocratie des chiffreurs, pour employer un mot qui revient souvent dans les vers de notre O'Neddy.[84]

Twentieth-century critical perspectives have lost something in their definitions of Borel with their distance from the historical and cultural environment of which Borel was a vital part. Borel should not be seen as the anomalous 'auteur provisoire' of Steinmetz, whose bizarre and unfinished career of literary revolt was waiting to be legitimised and taken up by proponents of contemporary ideologies. Although I believe that this approach can be fruitful in an artistic sense, as was the case with Surrealism, it lacks the precision that is needed in approaching a difficult and sparse body of work such as Borel's. The Surrealists, of course, were free to take from Borel what they needed as inspiration for their own, unique project, but their analyses of Borel provide more of an element of historic legitimacy for their revolutionary, artistic aims than they provide a clear portrait of Borel.

Flaubert is the best reason why we in the 1990s should appreciate the literary interest of Borel. Yet Flaubert gives little criticism or analysis of Borel. He was close

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[84] Asselineau, Charles, *Mélanges tiré d'une petite bibiliothèque romantique*, p. 138.

enough to Borel for his appropriation of many of Borel's ideas not to need a legitimising critique or a translation into contemporary terms. Flaubert displayed an almost guilty fascination with Borel; yet he was not compelled to explain or characterise Borel's importance at length, as did later authors who are quite evidently less certain of Borel's place or of his value. Flaubert was content to exclaim, 'Cela valait mieux que la monnaie courante d'à présent!' when writing of the lycanthrope. Yet, despite Flaubert's sparse comments on Borel's work, he admits more frequently than any other artist his fascination with him. And Flaubert's early writings demonstrate, more than that of any other artist or critic, an understanding through imitation of the struggles and the fatality that were the essence of Pétrus Borel.

Conclusion

Borel's place within the nineteenth century is now clear. He was a figure who benefitted and also suffered from a period of unique and rapid cultural evolution. He was innovative, and yet the nature of his celebrity has to this day obscured his importance. Because he fell so abruptly out of fashion and because, as Champfleury tactfully said, by the early 1840s he was 'quelque peu décoloré' in the eyes of Parisian followers of the literary scene, his work was rarely discussed until much later in the century. Very few authors beyond the 1830s had the courage to admit having read Borel, much less having owed a debt to him. Only inexhaustible bibliophiles and those fascinated by aesthetic curiosities mention Borel. And in the nineteenth century, only those authors whose confidence and insouciance regarding public opinion were plain admitted an appreciation for Borel. It took the perception of a Baudelaire or Flaubert to recognise his worth.

In addition to re-evaluating Borel, this thesis lays the groundwork for new studies of other members of the 'Petit cénacle' whose names have been relegated to the appendices of nineteenth-century literary history. Artists such as Philothée O'Neddy and Joseph Bouchardy enjoyed (or perhaps suffered) the same fleeting celebrity. Bouchardy went on to make a considerable name for himself in the *boulevard* theatres. Their projects, while not as sophisticated or influential as that of Borel, were tied inextricably to the cultural currents in which the *jeunes-France* myth developed. And in the case of works like O'Neddy's *Feu et flamme*, their expression was perhaps even more frenzied than that of Borel himself.

In the final analysis, Borel the writing author is perhaps less interesting than the literary phenomenon that grew around him under the influence of myriad cultural and

political pressures. Could one say that Borel, in a moment of epiphany, devised the innovative and ironic strategies that were important for Flaubert? Strangely, Borel's talent appears to have taken on the same traits as his 'guignon'. Like the characters in *Madame Putiphar*, he appeared as a personage with little subtlety, driven to adopt extreme literary attitudes by what he portrayed as the sinister and rapidly shifting nature of his moral universe - much as Déborah and Patrick, stock melodramatic characters, were unwitting players in a dynamic and malevolent conspiracy of circumstance. Borel appeared, in most instances, to be reacting against a hostile public and active persecution by political and literary institutions. It was this same persecution, fictional or not, that generated his literary response. Yet to what extent did Borel provoke his inclement critics and political foes, and to what extent was he the victim of the sort of fatal destiny that so fascinated him?

Borel's irony meant that the writing author was difficult to situate within his literary work. And in his correspondence, in his journalism, he was as given to paradox and self-contradiction as in his short stories. The mobility of Borel's irony kept his fictional personae just out of the reader's reach. The force and paradox of his rhetoric, the duplicity of his narrative voices at once engages and mystifies. Gauging his talent and influence holds much the same danger. Not surprisingly, Flaubert incorporates some of the mystery surrounding Borel in his acknowledgements: 'l'ombre de Pétrus Borel, blanche et innocente comme la face de Pierrot.' Flaubert's description of Borel as an actor portraying an innocent reveals the central dilemma of his artistic identity. Borel put himself in the position of reacting to public misconception. He portrayed himself as a guiltless and persecuted figure who longed for the simplicity of the Middle-Ages, or the solitude of a desert island.

Yet on further consideration, the violence of Borel's reactions does not match the caricature or the nature of his portrayal in the literary press. Certainly he was

misunderstood, but Borel himself admitted to growing impatient with critical silence on the subject of the *jeunes-France* not long after the premier of *Hernani*. In *La Liberté*, he admitted provoking a reaction so that the journals would write of him once again. And he was certainly given to exaggerating the extent and nature of critical distaste for his works. *Rhapsodies* caused little scandal, and at least one critic in the wake of *Champavert* saw beneath the mask of the lycanthrope 'un jeune fashionnable [sic]'.[1]

Nevertheless, Borel, more than most authors of his epoch, relied upon a dialogue with the critical press and his literary public. Contentious as his relationship with his reader was, he relied on the reader for the definition of his artistic identity. The sudden change of tone from *Champavert* to *Madame Putiphar* proves this.

In the end, situating Borel among the proliferation of attitudes and voices that he fostered is perhaps as difficult as trying to decipher the moral import of stories from *Champavert*, and perhaps as fruitless. The elusiveness of his authorial persona works at all levels. The final impression is one of a forceful and disruptive irony that is as enticing in its promise of the secrets of the enigma of Pétrus Borel, the lycanthrope, as it is evasive and disillusioning. Borel's all-encompassing, even Socratic irony, is his most enduring legacy.

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[1] Lacroix, Paul, 'Champavert, contes immoraux', *Revue de Paris*, vol. I, 48, 1833, p. 146.

Appendix I

The Concept of Romantic Irony

Many critical works have examined the phenomenon of Romantic Irony, but this has been particularly in the context of German Literature. Fewer have dealt extensively with the phenomenon in France, and those that have attempted the subject with regards to Borel and his comrades do not address the fact that irony served certain French authors in an attempt to transcend the pressures of the aforementioned cultural factors. Many critics move too freely between the epistemology of German Romantic Irony, and the French context. Certainly, many ideas in France on irony and models of literary irony were transmitted through foreign literary works. The works of Constant and Madame de Staël transmitted certain German ideas on irony. Translations of Hoffman also circulated ideas on irony within a literary context; the debate concerning irony as a legitimate poetic device, which was well developed in Germany, was inaugurated in Jean-Paul's *Vorschule der Ästhetik* and continued in Hoffman's *Die Prinzessin Brambillia*, available in France in the late 1820s. Similar debates did not exist in French literary circles at the same time. But the French Romantic movement had its own traditions. The irony of Voltaire or Laclos served as a much closer model. And French Romanticism had very different focuses from its foreign counterparts. While accommodating imported ideas, it did not often make philosophical debate concerning literary irony the centre of its polemics.

The works of a number of critics concerning French Romantic Irony sketch out limits that are at times too broad, and thus develop definitions of the subject that flow too easily outside the Romantic context. Lloyd Bishop, in his study *Romantic Irony in French Literature from Diderot to Beckett*, identifies no less than nine types of irony within the appellation 'Romantic Irony': mediate irony, normative irony, general irony, cosmic irony, world irony, metaphysical irony, suspensive irony, disjunctive irony and unstable irony.[1] He traces the sources of 'Romantic Irony' as far back as Petrarch, relying on a quotation from Friedrich von Schlegel.[2] He does not consider the fact that Schlegel never used the term 'Romantic Irony', but simply 'irony', and made no pretence of considering the metaphysical aspects of the term strictly within the intellectual debates of Schlegel's own period. Likewise, his extension of the term to include twentieth century works stretches the concept beyond its recognizable form in German metaphysics, which he relies upon heavily to establish his primary definition of the term.

Other works display a similar vagueness. For Vladimir Jankélévitch irony is 'une ivresse de la subjectivité transcendentale', for René Bourgeois, 'le sens du jeu'.

Lilian Furst is one of the only scholars to point out this weakness. In her work *Fictions of Romantic Irony in European Narrative, 1760-1857*, she gives a thorough account of the development of ideas of Romantic Irony both in the literature of the period considered and in contemporary criticism.[3] She displays a greater awareness of the difficulties of characterising Romantic Irony: thus, the title *Fictions of Romantic Irony*.

All who have written recently on the idea of 'Romantic Irony' in the French context agree that the concept goes well beyond the traditional and often rhetorical

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[1] Bishop, Lloyd, *Romantic Irony in French Literature from Diderot to Beckett* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1989).

[2] Ibid., p. 11.

[3] Furst, Lilian, *Fictions of Romantic Irony in European Narrative, 1760-1857* (London: Macmillan Press, 1984).

definitions of simple 'irony'. During the period in question in France, the early nineteenth century, irony was still popularly considered in terms of stylistic tropes. The term showed little evolution throughout the eighteentth century in France, but somewhere in the middle of the nineteenth century, the popular definition changed quite remarkably. In the first edition of the Dictionary of the French Academy (1694), irony was defined in terms of rhetoric:

> IRONIE. s. f. Figure de Rhetorique, par laquelle on veut faire entendre le contraire de ce qu'on dit, & qui consiste presque toute dans le ton de la voix & dans la maniere de prononcer. Tout ce discours n'est qu'une ironie. l'ironie estoit la figure de Socrate 'il dit cela par ironie.'[4]

or, in 1777:

> L'ironie est un Trope par lequel on exprime tout le contraire de ce que l'on pense et de ce que l'on veut faire entendre : le mot est Grec, nous disons en François contre-vérité [...][5]

Little had changed at the time of the fifth Academy dictionary in 1798:

> IRONIE. s. fém. Figure de Rhétorique, par laquelle on dit le contraire de ce qu'on veut faire entendre. Tout ce discours n'est qu'une ironie. L'ironie étoit la figure favorite de Socrate. Il dit cela par ironie. Ironie heureuse. Ironie amère.[6]

The situation was much the same thirty years later:

> Ironie. Figure de rhétorique, où la parole est directement opposée à la pensée. Mais, loin de cacher la pensée, cette manière d'employer la parole fait ressortir avec plus de force ce qu'on a dans l'esprit.[7]

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[4]*Dictionnaire de l'Académie Française* (Paris: Jean-Baptiste Coignard, 1694), I, p.612

[5]Crevier, *Rhétorique françoise* (Paris: 1777) cited in Bourgeois, René, *L'Ironie romantique* (Grenoble: Presses Universitaires de Grenoble, 1974), p. 8.

[6] *Dictionnaire de l'Académie Française* (Paris: J. J. Smits et Cie., 1798), vol. I, p.746

[7]*Dictionnaire de la conversation et de la lecture*, Hugo, Janin, Mérimée, et. al. (Paris: Belin-Mandar, 1837); cited in Bourgeois, p. 8.

It is ironic that the final, purely rhetorical and stylistic definition comes from a work whose collaborators were among the great names of the French Romantic movement: Hugo, Mérimée, Janin.

But, rather earlier, by 1835, the phrase 'Socratic Irony' had also come into usage. 'Irony' went rapidly from being considered a stylistic trope akin to sarcasm, to being considered a mode of being which permeated all aspects of expression. The sixth edition of the French Academy Dictionary of 1835 included the corollary 'Socratic irony' to the original, rhetorical definition.[8] 'Socratic irony' referred to Plato's portrait of Socrates; not only was it used to define his mode of argumentation against the Sophists, but, as typified in Kierkegaard's doctoral thesis of 1841, 'Socratic irony' was a mode of criticism and detachment that, in its negativity, allowed for the freedom of its subject from the object criticised: a means of floating just out of distance of the object, while maintaining a critical relationship to it. In a sense, 'Socratic irony', as understood in the nineteenth century, was also a means to accept or portray paradox because of the freedom of identity that it entailed. Here we may return to Kierkegaard's remarks concerning irony and communication: irony was the means by which the subject could free himself from a binding with his interlocutor in a circuit of communication. These philosophical nuances had come to the French Romantics via the Germans, but their late appearance, and the comparatively small space devoted to discussion of irony directly in the French philosophical or literary context, demands some discussion. In France, Borel's own production was contiguous with the appearance of early ideas on 'formalist' poetry (Gautier's calls for the autonomy of art in the mid-1830s), with 'Utilitarianism' and with Comte's *Cours de philosophie positive*. There are some important distinctions to be made

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[8] *Dictionnaire de l'Académie Française* (Paris:Firmin, Didot Frères, 1835), vol. II, p.751.

between the intellectual climate of late-eighteenth and early nineteenth-century Germany, and 1830s France.

Among German philosophers and Romantics, irony expressed a consciousness that appeared concidentally with a rejection of the logic and method of the Enlightenment. Ideas on the freedom and mobility of 'existential' (as opposed to 'rhetorical') irony were easily extrapolated from the subjective philosophy of Fichte and Schelling. For one of the most important aesthetic theorists of Romantic Irony, Friedrich von Schlegel, it was an awareness of the chaos and plenitude of experience, an irreducible incongruity.[9] In the Romantic, artistic context, this philosophical phenomenon was translated in varying ways. Rhetorical irony still played a large role, but a universal sense of irony lay at the foundation of a number of aesthetic concepts: Romantic fascination with the grotesque; the Romantic egotism coupled paradoxically with a sense of awe at the sublimity and grandeur of natural beauty; and a new heterodoxy regarding traditional genres. Irony was a means of elevating the metaphorical perspective, a newfound subjectivity that allowed for the appreciation, if not the comprehension, of aesthetic elements characterised by vast complexity and paradox.

In France, this acute awareness of plenitude and of chaos took a number of forms; perhaps the best known concerned the melange of genres in Romantic theatre, and the search for beauty beyond the symmetry of classical elements: the beauty of the grotesque.[10] The polemical tracts of Hugo are prime examples of an advocacy of this facet of 'Romantic Irony'. But the second generation of Romantics found themselves

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[9]For Schlegel, experience was complex to the extent that only an ambivalent or duplicitous perspective could capture some of its chaotic variety. Irony, for the younger Schlegel, then stems from, 'klares Bewusstsein der ewigen Agilität, des unendlich vollen Chaos'. See von Schlegel, Friedrich, Hans Eichner, ed., *Kritische Friedrich Schlegel Ausgabe* (Paderborn: Shöningh, 1967), p. 263.

[10]See Gillespie, Gerard, 'Romantic Irony and the Grotesque', in *Romantic Irony*, Frederick Garber, ed. (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1988)

facing a very different set of problems; although they played an active role in support of Romantic innovation in the theatre, by the mid and early 1830s Romanticism itself was accepted as an artistic movement; it was even seen as moribund by some of its participants, or at least as having established itself and thus no longer serving its original purpose. By 1833, Sainte-Beuve saw the first generation of Romantics as having already conquered the "prames et pataches classiques".[11] Despite (or perhaps because of) contention from elements of aesthetic conservatism, Romantic theatre often played to packed houses.

Then, suddenly, in the words of Sainte-Beuve, 'le brusque ouragan de juillet bouleversa tout.'[12] Political concerns pressed heavily upon journalism and literature, and the royalism that had been associated with an important segment of the Romantic movement was eclipsed in certain measure by Saint-Simonianism. The vestiges of a system of patronage in the literary world, where a young Hugo could receive a government pension for *Odes et ballades*, fell away abruptly as the political landscape shifted and printing technology evolved rapidly. Literature took refuge in journalism. The 'Romantic Irony' of Borel's group of authors making their debuts in the first years of the 1830s was an acute condition linked inextricably with the changing political and economic situation of the artist.

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[11]Cited in Martino, Pierre, *L'Epoque romantique en France* (Paris: Hatier, 1944), p. 154.

[12]Martino, op. cit., p. 154.

Appendix 2

Irony and the Ethics of Fiction in 1830s France

The speculation concerning the role of the artist in society among the artists of Borel's generation presupposed a set of ethical conditions surrounding the relationship of the artist to his reader. If an artist is to propagate ideas, be they aesthetic or political, raise consciousness or even urge people to action, his ideas or his incitations must first pass through the medium of the reader. The artist's capability not only to impose an aesthetic or political agenda, but in fact to communicate the most fundamental aspects of his vision, is precluded by the process of actualisation or re-creation of the text that is involved in the reading process. Before being certain of his ability to convey his 'idea', the artist must first examine the conditions of his relationship to his reader, his responsibilities to the reader and to his text. But there are conditions that predate a reader's experience of the text itself. There exist ethical norms that are dependent on unique historical factors, that exercise a considerable and often 'pre-conditioning' effect on the act of reading; such norms affected Borel's reception among contemporary critics and artists. These same factors exercise an equally strong influence upon the author's 'pre-textual' awareness of his readers' likely state of mind and reaction. Lilian Furst turns naturally to the idea of an ethics of reading when discussing reader reception in her work *Through the Lens of the Reader*:[13]

> The text is indeed, as Wolfgang Iser insists, given actuality by its readers; however, that must be done not by an imperious reader asserting power over the

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[13]Furst, Lilian R., *Through the Lens of the Reader* (Albany: State University Press of New York, 1992).

> text, but by a considerate reader inclined to submit to the signals emitted by the text and prepared to pay scrupulous attention to its linguistic and narrational characterstics.[14]

Such 'considerateness', or lack of it, pre-dates the actual reading. Within this statement one perceives the value judgement that invariably arises when one examines the process of actualisation. One naturally speculates upon whether the reader's reading will 'do violence' to the text. Can the reader understand the author's perspective, or is the reader too far removed as a result of cultural, political or other differences? Will the reader be provoked by the text? Will his emotional state alter his understanding of what is read? All of these are factors that Borel considered when provoking his reader. He could be certain that the reader would recognise generic patterns, (through, as Furst suggests, sensitivity to linguistic and narrational elements). But he was reluctant to pass on concrete opinions in most cases through his writing. His aim was to unbalance the reader.

However, the particular emotional effects of Borel's work do not concern us for the moment. We are concerned more with the relationship between author and reader in an ethical sense, regarding the contract that engaging in the reading process implies. As Furst points out, a sensitive reader is 'good'; an imperious reader is 'bad'. When a reader embarks upon a text, what is the importance of his pre-suppositions and how does his conception of his own role vis-à-vis that of the author affect the process of his reading?

In his work *The Company We Keep, an Ethics of Fiction*, Wayne Booth explores a number of questions pertaining to the 'responsibility' both of author to reader and of reader to author; this reciprocity is predicated on a relationship that is strong and definable, and bears many implied conditions.[15] It approaches what Booth terms a

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[14]Furst, p. 2.

[15]Booth, Wayne, *The Company We Keep, an Ethics of Fiction* (London: The University of California Press, 1988).

literary 'friendship'. There is an unspoken, though nevertheless binding, contract that both reader and author enter into in both the creation and the actualisation of a work. The image of 'friendship' best describes the intimacy and the tacit bond that characterise this relationship. The author offers something of value to his reader, an experience that cannot be gained otherwise than through the experience of his narrative. As Georges Poulet, a critic of the 'Geneva School' who also focuses upon the 'consciousness of reading', points out, the kinship between author and reader can be remarkably strong, and acts on a fundamental level of desire:

> I am aware of a rational being, of a consciousness; the consciousness of another, no different from the one I automatically assume in every human being I encounter, except that in this case the consciousness is open to me, welcomes me, lets me look deep inside itself, and even allows me, with unheard-of license, to think what it thinks and feel what it feels.[16]

Nevertheless, it is an unspoken contract and, as we shall see, it is thus subject to subtle yet powerful manipulation. There is a certain implied freedom that Poulet describes: he uses the important word 'license'. The relationship is perhaps not as free as Poulet suggests. There are values brought into the context and rewards expected from both the readerly and writerly poles of a text. The licence comes with a price.

Returning to Booth, and the idea of friendship, one finds that the relationship described by Poulet, and one which Booth claims is inextricable from an ethical context, is a reciprocal exchange of gifts. The writer's responsibility to the reader can, in certain contexts, be seen as one of honesty: certainly not honesty in the sense of truth or non-fictionality, but an honesty regarding the nature and, to some extent, value of the work of art presented.

Booth encapsulates the nature of friendship in three formulae:

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[16]Poulet, Georges, 'Criticism and the Experience of Interiority' in *The Structuralist Controversy: The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man*, Richard Macksey and Eugene Donatio, eds. (Baltimore: University of Maryland Press, 1972), p. 57.

1) friendship predicated upon some exterior, limited contract, as in a business or a game;

2) friendship predicated upon pleasure, as in drinking or conversation;

3) and finally, the strongest variety of friendship, and that which Booth identifies as most resembling the relationship of literary author to reader, a relationship of virtue. This occurs when both parties bring not only pleasure, but intellectual or spiritual benefit to each other.

It is in this final sense that we can evaluate the intellectual gift offered by literary authors. Even for authors of works designed primarily for diversion, melodrama for example, there is an element of this third bond of friendship: the work offers experience that a reader could not perhaps have outside the work, a broadening of horizons.

The character of honesty in the author, regarding his relationship with the reader, concerns this bond of friendship or tacit literary contract: how does the author represent the 'virtue' of his gift? In the words of Sartre, a work's value begins with an evaluation of virtue by the reader. The energy of evaluation moves dialectically between author and reader, with the alteration of artistic production through critical feedback and renewed and altered feedback with changes in artistic production:

> Ainsi la lecture est-elle un exercice de générosité; et ce que l'écrivain réclame du lecteur n'est pas l'application d'une liberté abstraite, mais le don de toute sa personne, avec ses passions, ses préventions, ses sympathies, son tempérament sexuel, son échelle de valeurs. Seulement, cette personne se donnera avec générosité, la liberté la traverse de part en part et vient transformer les masses les plus obscurs de sa sensibilité. Et comme l'activité s'est fait passive pour mieux créer l'objet, réciproquement la passivité devient acte, l'homme qui lit s'est élevé du plus haut [...] Ainsi, l'auteur écrit pour s'adresser à la liberté des lecteurs et il la requiert de faire exister son œuvre. Mais il ne se borne pas là, et il exige en outre qu'ils lui retournent cette confiance qu'il leur a donnée, qu'ils reconnaissent

> sa liberté créative et qu'ils la sollicitent à leur tour par un appel symmétrique et inverse.[17]

Both author and reader push each other to new levels of experience and achievement through the iterations of the cycle. The difficulty of the text, and the expansion of the reader's horizons, fulfill the author's side of the bargain; and the reader's increasing demands upon the author, thereby giving impetus to the development of his artistic ability, comprises part of the reader's side. Sartre writes of freedom, but this must be understood in the sense of an engagement like that in Kierkegaard's circuit of communication and identity: the subject (and in this reciprocal sense, the object, too) is positively free *therein*. The two poles push each other unfettered toward greater achievement, and this movement is dependent upon their mutual recognition of freedom within the unspoken contract, that is, upon mutual trust. They are not free in any greater sense.

Here we can return to the comment of Lilian Furst, and to that of Achille Devéria in the *Artiste* of 1831:[18] the artist's temperament is easily agitated, and an important responsibility lies with the reader for maintaining the bond of trust between artist and public that maintains this dialectical movement, pushing both participants to expand their capacities for production and understanding of art.

> Do I as reader have any obligation to that elusive character whom I myself re-create as I read the work? If so, how am I to express it? What is the relation between taking my pleasure with the work and attempting to discover the pleasure that the author intends to share? [...] must I not also accept the responsibility to enter into serious dialogue with the author about how his or her values join or conflict with mine? To decline the gambit, to remain passive in the face of the author's strongest passions and deepest convictions is surely condescending, insulting and finally irresponsible.[19]

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[17]Sartre, Jean Paul, *Qu'est-ce que la littérature* (Paris: Gallimard, 1948), p. 64-5.

[18]See Ch. 1, pp. 28-9.

[19]Booth, Wayne, *The Company We Keep, an Ethics of Fiction*, p. 135.

In this ethical sense, Borel saw art as a social phenomenon; his polemics on art and culture were never in terms of general utilitarianism ('[...] je prie aussi en grâce de ne point me confondre avec les *utilitaires*'[20]), but in the context of the social nature of the artistic contract discussed above. Borel's criticism *and his art* focused upon the complex interactions between artist and public. In his article 'Des artistes penseurs et des artistes creux' cited above, Borel lays stress upon the social context of art, not simply in terms of the representation of social forces within the work, but in the relationships and ethical standards that surround and shape the work itself:

> L'art ira toujours décroissant tant qu'on obstinera à ne point le regarder comme un élément social et à nier sa mission d'exprimer les rapports de tous les êtres, les rapports du créé au créateur, des hommes aux hommes, de l'homme à l'univers.[21]

Borel employs the word 'exprimer'; his work does not simply depict the forces of social interaction, but recreates and explores the difficulties of their dynamic. The contract implicit in the expression of art as an 'élément social' is strained to its limits in the work of Borel. His literary strategies, in representing the relationships mentioned in his article, encompass not only a sometimes subtle and often challenging exploration of the ethical relations depicted through the work, but also an original approach to the manipulation of the responsibilities shared both by artist and reader through the text. Borel's focus upon these responsibilities, the 'appel symmétrique et inverse', and the freedom that his irony allowed within the expected norms of authorial responsibility toward the reader had intriguing literary side-effects. It is clear from his more theoretical comments that his playing with these norms was self-aware and sophisticated.

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[20]Borel, Pétrus, 'Des artistes penseurs et des artistes creux', *L'Artiste*, vol. I, t. V, 21, 1833.

[21]Ibid.

Appendix III

Pixerécourt's *Latude*

> Il fallait leur rappeler dans un thème toujours nouveau de contexture, toujours uniforme de résultats, cette grande leçon dans laquelle se résument toutes les philosophies, appuyées sur toutes les religions: que même ici-bas, la vertu n'est jamais sans récompense, le crime n'est jamais sans châtiments. Et qu'on n'aille pas s'y tromper! ce n'était pas peu de chose que le mélodrame! c'est la moralité de la révolution.[1]

These observations that we have seen by Nodier, a contemporary of Borel and considered at times, like Borel, to be on the wild fringe of Romanticism, apply perfectly to Borel's adaptation of melodrama. At the time that Borel and Nodier were writing, Melodrama and Romanticism were closely interwoven, and shared many of the same tropes.

The themes of persecution and incarceration have been studied extensively in the context of Romanticism. The same themes have been given considerably less attention in the context of melodrama. There is a great deal of overlap between the two genres, and more than one critic has mentioned that the differences between French Romantic theatre and melodramatic theatre in the 1820s and 1830s are more theoretical than real. A closer examination of the melodramatic sources of Borel's only novel, and the work of Pixerécourt than was possible earlier, is relevant here. The comparison reveals the careful attention that Borel pays to his reader, and brings to light the intentions and underlying structures of the work.

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[1] 'Introduction' by Charles Nodier in de Pixerécourt, Guilbert, *Théâtre choisi*. As quoted above, Ch. 3, p. 100.

Latude, ou trente-cinq ans de captivité follows the imprisonment and persecution of Henri Masers de Latude at the hands of the Marquise de Pompadour, mistress of Louis XV and, as far as the play is concerned, the power behind the throne. The circumstances are nearly identical to a large portion of *Madame Putiphar.* The play begins with Latude, a sympathetic but naive young man, hoping to gain favour with 'La Pompadour' by orchestrating a false plot against her, and then bringing the plot to her attention. He sends her an anonymous gift, followed by a letter which he signs announcing that the gift is poisoned.

While waiting for an audience with Mme de Pompadour, he encounters Dalègre, a musketeer who has been the author of numerous anonymous verses attacking the Marquise. His character strongly resembles that of Fitz-Harris. Dalègre has come for an audience with Pompadour, hoping to regain his place among the musketeers from which he was expelled when suspicion fell upon him as the author of the verses. In a curious and fateful turn of events, Dalègre gives Latude a handwritten copy of the verses, in case he himself is searched or arrested during his audience.

Toward the end of the act, Latude has managed to gain the confidence of one of the palace milkmaids, who leads him to Pompadour. In the meantime, Pompadour has discovered that the handwriting engraved on the gift box meant to contain the poison is the same as that of Latude's letter! Latude is quickly arrested and searched. The verses are discovered, and he is sent immediately to the Bastille.

There, after many months of imprisonment, he accomplishes a number of unlikely tasks, fashioning a rope ladder of 124 feet from ripped bed linen and spare firewood, a file and saw from bed and door-fittings and cutlery. He hides his materials in a gap in the floor, and in so doing, realises that Dalègre has been arrested and placed in the cell below him. Latude's industry in prison contrasts sharply with the despair that Patrick and Fitz-Harris suffer. The psychological torment leaves Borel's characters

weakened. They hallucinate and grow physically ill. Latude's conduct in prison, although giving evidence of his suffering, constantly intimates his eventual release and exoneration. Hope is woven into even the most discouraging moments of the melodramatic plot.

During his incarceration, Latude has kept up a correspondence via carrier pigeon with the milkmaid who, having fallen madly in love with him during his afternoon at Trianon, has taken a garret apartment near the Bastille. The milkmaid, Henriette, blames herself for Latude's imprisonment, and has devoted her life to seeing him set free.

The dimensions and description of the octagonal prison cell in *Latude* are identical to the descriptions of Fitz-Harris's and Patrick's first cell in *Madame Putiphar*, before their transfer to any one of a number of filthy *oubliettes*. In addition, there is a scene in which Saint-Marc, the cruel prison governor, who resembles in numerous ways de Rougemont from *Madame Putiphar*, discovers the pigeon that has been carrying messages back and forth between Latude and Henriette, and chokes it to death in front of Latude. There is a great deal of similarity between this scene, and the scene in *Madame Putiphar*, where de Rougemont kills the dog that had been Patrick's companion in prison.

Shortly before his transfer to a more secure cell, Latude manages to escape. He flees to Holland with Dalègre, and is followed by Henriette, who has received word of his escape, and by Lenoir, the police captain, who has vowed to re-capture Latude. In Holland, Latude adopts a disguise, and works for a shipping house. Lenoir tracks him down, but his plan to arrest Latude is sabotaged by a clever ruse of Dalègre's. Dalègre enlists the mariners who work for the shipping company to accuse Lenoir of a series of crimes that have been plaguing the city. A small riot ensues, and in the confusion, Latude is able to escape. But he waits for Henriette to join him. She had arrived in Amsterdam shortly after Latude and Dalègre, but when she heard false news spread by Lenoir of Latude's death, she threw herself into a canal. Henriette survives, but does not

appear at the rendez-vous with Latude in time. Dalègre's ruse only delays Lenoir for a short while, and he manages to corner Latude in the shipyard and finally arrests him.

During the many years of Latude's imprisonment, Henriette pursued Lenoir and the prison governor doggedly to secure Latude's release. Both Lenoir and Saint-Marc are cruel to the prisoners, and see her as not only a nuisance, but a threat should she ever bring their abuses to the attention of the pre-revolutionary government. Finally, after his re-arrest, Henriette receives a letter for Latude's release. But Lenoir and Saint-Marc pretend to have no knowledge of Latude. Within the play, it is implied that many such prisoners exist whose accounts of abuses by those currently in power have caused them to be buried alive, sequestered in the darkest and most forgotten chambers of France's state prisons, never to be released. At this moment in the play, Pixerécourt expresses a common view of the popular discontent that led to the revolution; this image foreshadowed the climax of *Madame Putiphar*:

> [...] la haine [du peuple] qui s'amasse et grossit chaque jour, jusqu'à l'heure fatale où elle déborde et engloutit les trônes [...][2]

Pixerécourt implies that a popular uprising serves to avenge the persecution of those who will perhaps never see justice done for themselves. But, unlike Borel's work, within the play, the happy and moralising conclusion that follows fulfills what an audience had come to expect from melodrama.

On the day of the visit of the prison inspector, Lenoir and Saint-Marc have Latude transferred to a hidden cell. The other prisoners are cautioned against saying his name. Dalègre, in the meantime, has gone mad, and is allowed to stay with the other prisoners. He does not appear a threat, as he lives under the delusion that he is the police chief, and is in constant pursuit of criminals. He does not seem to recognise the name

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[2] Pixerécourt, *Théâtre choisi*, p. 486.

Latude when questioned. Henriette arrives at the prison with her letter, and shows it to the inspector. Lenoir and Saint-Marc again deny any knowledge of Latude, but Dalègre shows a momentary recognition of the name. The prison is searched, and the governor comes across the hidden cell. Lenoir and Saint-Marc refuse to bring the prisoner out, claiming that he is 'un fou dangereux'.[3] But Saint-Marc reveals his guilt by suddenly growing pale. He is obviously anxious that his plot to keep Latude sequestered is about to be uncovered, and in a typically melodramatic mechanism of recognition, his expression gives him away.

Latude is freed and exonerated; Lenoir is arrested, and in the final lines of the play, Latude pronounces the moral that is remarkably similar to the moralising conclusion of *Madame Putiphar*, though somewhat less cruel. When asked to whom Lenoir will answer for his crimes, Latude answers:

> Au roi d'abord, puis à la postérité, qui ne séparera plus le nom des persécuteurs de celui de la victime.[4]

The idea is that, despite the magnitude of the crimes committed against Latude, he will perhaps not see justice fulfilled completely in his lifetime, or if he does, it will not be in a context that he can see or understand. There is a larger historical perspective, in which the persecution of innocents by people such as Lenoir is expiated through social upheaval. Although the idea is not developed in quite the same manner as it is in *Madame Putiphar*, the historical approach to the events surrounding the revolution reveals a similar thinking. Philosophical ideas that attempted to come to grips with the immensity of suffering brought about by the Revolution of 1789 (and by the Ancien Régime under which there were far more arbitrary imprisonments) were reflected in a

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[3] Ibid., p. 489.

[4] Ibid., p. 491.

great deal of melodrama, and as Nodier pointed out, melodrama expressed the morality of the Revolution.

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